

**A Feast, a Dance, and a Funeral:  
an Exploration of Contemporary Tongan Culture  
across Three Christian Denominations**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines a debate about contemporary Tongan culture that is unfolding across a range of arenas that force Tongans to contend with differing ideas of family, money, and bodies. At the center of this debate is a dichotomy over how people envision the future of Tongan culture: should Tongans adhere to “the Tongan way” or should they embrace “the *palangi* (white foreign) way” of organizing their families, managing their finances, and dressing their bodies. “The Tongan way,” or *faka-Tonga*, involves recognizing large, expansive networks of kin and submitting to the authority of key relatives, generous material care that extends outwards, and wrapping large bodies in Tongan textiles as an act of respect and indexing a long history of Tongan values and religion. “The *palangi* way,” or *fakapalangi*, refers to a set of values rooted in Western notions of individualism and capitalism that favor a nuclear family organization, individual self-sufficiency and capital accumulation, and non-wrapped slender bodies.

Christianity is a major factor in this debate as churches organize much of Tongan social life and have deep influences—or in many cases are the forums for discussion—over people’s ideas. Methodism is the most traditional Christian denomination in Tonga and heavily promotes a strict adherence to Tongan values, in part because these traditions are extremely beneficial for Methodist church leaders. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS or Mormon) in Tonga is at the other end of the spectrum and in many cases explicitly promotes ideas that align with “the *palangi* way”—particularly in regard to how people manage their money, which, in turn, is intricately linked to how people reckon their families. Finally, the Catholic Church sits between Methodists and Mormons; in some ways Catholics are very “traditional” in Tonga, and in other ways offer flexibility for congregants to shift between “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way.” I argue that rather than being completely separate spheres, family and money in Tonga are closely intertwined with one another so that changing an approach to one necessarily changes a person’s approach to the other; second that this debate over the shape of contemporary Tongan life is seen in people’s bodies and materially through dress that is used to symbolize different allegiances to Tongan or *palangi* values.



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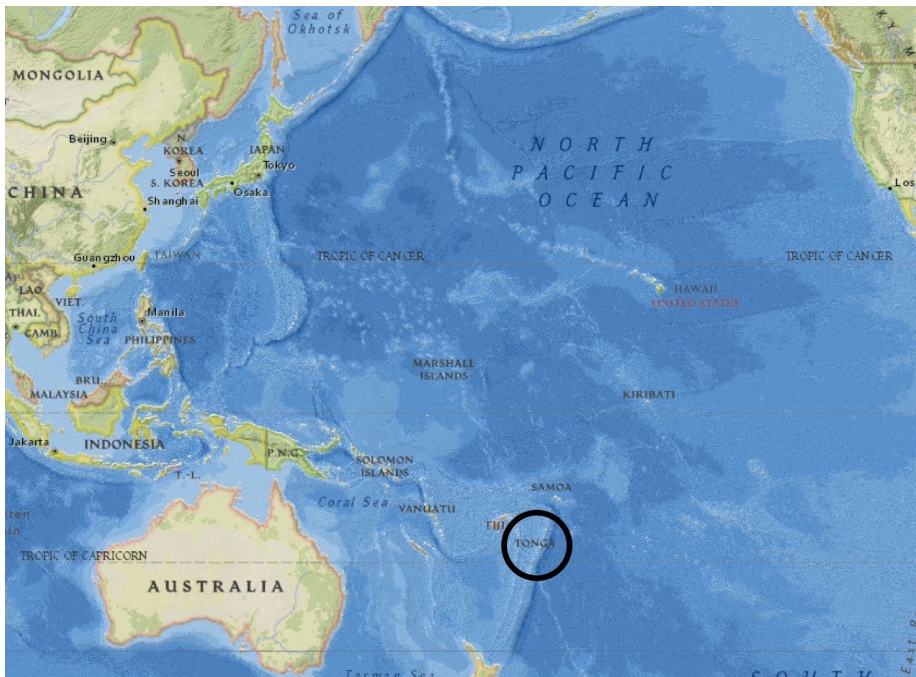
I cannot imagine doing this work without the support of my advisor Susan McKinnon who has helped with immense generosity at every stage of this project. It is a privilege to work with someone who cares so deeply about both the work and the people behind it. I would also like to thank Lise Dobrin for always showing me other angles through which to see culture and encouraging me early on to consider Tonga as a field site. I am grateful for help from Fred Damon who has consistently pointed me in interesting directions in terms of people to meet and literature to read. I greatly appreciate help from Vanessa Ochs in early phases of this project and in serving as my outside reader. I have learned so much from all of my committee members—including past members Eve Danziger and Peter Metcalf—who truly show what it means to teach outside and beyond classrooms and all of whom have helped me both academically and personally.

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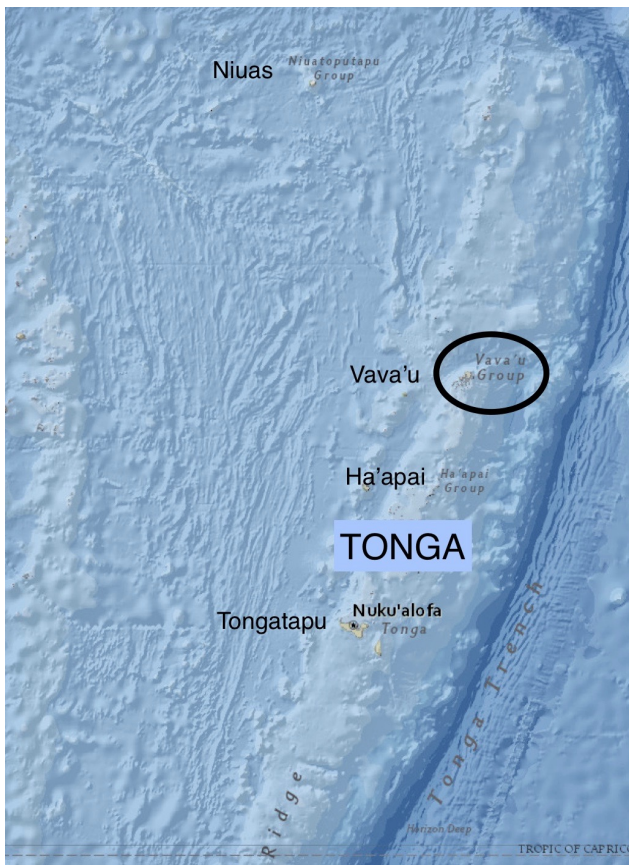
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## Maps of the Tongan Islands



Map 1 - Tonga's location in the Pacific Ocean. It lies just north of the Tropic of Capricorn and just west of the International Date Line.



Map 2 - The Tongan archipelago consists of four island groups. Vava'u is 200 miles north of Tongatapu. There are over 150 islands in Tonga, but only 36 are inhabited.



Map 3 - Vava'u is 53 square miles and is the second-most populated island group in Tonga with 15% of the population—15,000 residents. Tongatapu has a population of 70,000.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In 1953 Queen Salote—the first and (as yet) only female sovereign in the Kingdom of Tonga, who was devoted to the preservation of Tongan culture—decreed that Tongans must wear *ta'ovala* (plaited pandanus mats) when entering government or church buildings, thus making a leaf-textile wrapped body part of daily national attire in Tonga (Addo 2013). *Ta'ovala* are worn as the final layer of clothing on top of modest dress and they wrap bodies typically from waist to knee (see Photo 1.1). This dissertation investigates how wrapping signifies a commitment to “the Tongan way” of living life: distinctly Tongan approaches to caring for family, church, and one’s body that highlight extended family relations and the value of extensive exchange obligations and networks. Moreover, it explores how these Tongan values are currently being challenged by what is perceived to be “the *palangi* way” of living (*palangi* meaning foreigner, although whiteness is implied). “The *palangi* way” implies an adoption of various Western values. Such values can include individual achievement and decision-making, restricted nuclear family relations, and the value of saving, capital accumulation, and restricted exchange networks. Often an adherence to these values are signaled by the refusal to wear *ta'ovala* in favor of “modern” Western clothing. In Tonga, while the former set of values are most evident among Methodists (the church of the royal family), the latter are strikingly visible

among Mormons. The Catholics occupy a middle-ground, participating in Tongan traditions and events that uphold Tongan kinship values, but not in a way that turns the church into an explicitly ersatz chiefly system. It is important to understand this contrast as it elucidates the multitude of ways in which the debate over the direction of contemporary Tongan culture is manifesting. One side of this debate sees Tongan family structure and the associated obligations (read as “traditions”) as essential to the future of Tongan culture. In these lies the strength of Tongan culture and that which will protect Tongans from the perceived dangers of Western-oriented development (like homelessness, hunger, poverty, children without families). The other side sees extended Tongan kinship networks and the burdensome, often financial, obligations that accompany them as a hindrance to the progress of Tonga and seeks to transform Tongan social relations altogether.

The religious landscape in Tonga is central to this dissertation and requires some clarification. Tonga is situated in the South Pacific; its closest geographical neighbors are Fiji and Samoa. Unlike every other Polynesian nation, Tonga maintained its sovereignty throughout the colonial era and is the only remaining and ruling Polynesian kingdom. In addition to these oft-touted facts about the kingdom, Tonga is known for its Christian conservatism with vibrant church attendance, church affiliation as a primary identity for people, and prayers as a regular feature of nearly every type of gathering. One of the first details travel guides “warn” tourists about is the strict modesty in dress (and particularly swimwear) and to be prepared for everything to shut down on Sundays in observation of the Christian Sabbath. Ninety-nine percent of the population is Christian (the other one percent is a mix of Bahá’í, Hindu, and Islam) and although there are dozens of Christian

denominations in Tonga, ninety percent belong to one of the Methodist churches, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,<sup>1</sup> or the Roman Catholic Church (“Tonga 2011 Census”).

The Methodist Church has experienced several schisms in the early twentieth century that resulted in three distinct denominations: the Free Wesleyan Church (36%), the Free Church of Tonga (12%), and the Church of Tonga (7%). Currently the Royal Family is affiliated with the Wesleyan Church and most of my Methodist informants come from the Wesleyan Church. When referring to “Methodists,” I mean anyone affiliated with any of the three branches; otherwise I will specify the denominations. Due to its early presence in Tonga and its early independence from the overseeing churches in Australia, the Tongan Methodist churches adopted many cultural Tongan features—from feasting as the primary form of celebration to prestation-style offerings to the church and its ministers. The Methodist ministry itself has been compared to an alternative chiefly system (Ni-umeitolu 1993) and an early way for Tongan commoners to increase their social rank. Although the Methodist churches together seem to account for a majority of the Christians in Tonga, many informants dispute this claim arguing that particularly young people attend charismatic evangelical churches regularly but only return to the Methodist churches for life crises events like baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

There are also some statistical disparities in regard to the LDS Church. According to their own metrics, which are based on recorded baptisms and children of Mormon fam-

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<sup>1</sup> I will use LDS when referring to the church and Mormon when referring to the members.

ilies who presumably will be baptized when they come of age, Mormons make up a staggering sixty percent of the population in Tonga (“Tonga: LDS Statistics”). This does not account, however, for migration out of Tonga, lapses in practice, or people belonging (formally or informally) to other churches. The figures from the Tongan Census claim a more modest, though still large, nineteen percent of the population belonging to the LDS Church (“Tonga 2011 Census”). Visually in Tonga it *feels* like Mormons are everywhere as their church buildings are present in nearly every village and are visually very clearly marked as Mormon. Because Mormons came later to Tonga and are part of a highly organized international structure with clear and open lines of communication, there are fewer Tongan cultural elements that have penetrated the LDS Church. Additionally, there are a handful of “traditional” Tongan practices that are outright discouraged by the LDS Church: over-generous spending on events or as gifts and participation in kava drinking, particularly in “kava clubs.”

The Roman Catholic Church accounts for sixteen percent of the population and although at one point it was at odds with the Methodist Churches in Tonga—according to a familiar Catholic-Protestant divide—currently the Catholic and Methodist Churches together make up the traditional establishment and are grouped together as churches that are well integrated with Tongan values. This alignment with “the Tongan way” is evident through the churches’ support of traditions such as large, formal funerals and periods of mourning, feasting, drinking kava, patterns of authority in the family that are emblematic of Tongan kinship, and dress in *ta’ovala*. The LDS Church presents a stark contrast to this and is more explicitly closer to “the *palangi* way,” not only because of the variously



subtle or overt discouragement of some Tongan traditions, but through the encouragement of nuclear family organization, individual-oriented financial management, and “modern” Western style dress.

### **Wide and Narrow**

In Tonga, dress exists on a spectrum that is anchored by motifs of wide and narrow; and dress is symbolically used at times that correlate with a host of other features. Wideness, which corresponds with adherence to Tongan values, or “the Tongan way,” is, as we have seen, exemplified by wrapping in *ta’ovala*, which accentuates existing physical wideness and makes bodies appear larger. “Wideness” is also manifest in the wide, lateral network of relatives and people who are “like family” that are maintained through formal and generalized reciprocal exchange. The network is wide and the money, food, textiles, and time given extends widely from a person. This type of extensive reciprocity, in terms of time and resources, is an expensive system in which to participate, but is quintessentially Tongan. Kin relationships are perpetuated, strengthened, and brought into existence through material care. Widened dress not only correlates with this system of values but upholds and embodies it, as mats—the objects people use to wrap themselves—are often gifts that can represent one’s large network or prominent family.

The wide networks of people and the wide outward movement of things is contrasted with “the *palangi* way” of managing money, possessions, and family that keeps everything “narrowly” closed in. Dress that narrows one’s body, and bodies made slender through dieting—both exemplified at Mormon dances—distances people from large net-

works of kin and the associated responsibilities. The motif of narrowness extends to these relations as operative networks become smaller and individual agency and preference take precedence over obedience and deference to relatives outside the immediate family. Similarly, in the Mormon dances and the LDS Church more generally, asserting a standard of modesty for its members that is different from the larger community thrusts the *church* into the position of supreme respect and the ultimate authority, rather than the government, nobility, or specific family members.

I use the symbolism of wide and narrow to refer to “the Tongan way” and “the palangi way,” respectively. Wide and narrow are my analytic terms, rather than terms that emerged from informants’ observations. These are useful symbolic categories as they gather together diverse ethnographic material—bodies, dress, kinship, exchange, eating, feasting, dancing, funerals, textile production—that allow for an exploration of contrast across a wide range of domains. “The Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way” are informant-led categories (that map onto wide and narrow) and come directly from the observations and explanations of my informants. “The Tongan way,” or *faka-Tonga*<sup>2</sup> are both terms used to describe explicit values that Tongans uphold and in which they take pride: love, generosity, a welcoming attitude, obedience to God, country, and family, respect, and modesty. Other features that were variously described to me as being particularly Tongan, or even “traditional” (and exemplify the aforementioned values) were *ta’ovala*-layered formal dress, greeting people by inviting them in to eat, giving gifts of food and textiles,

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<sup>2</sup> *Faka* is a prefix denoting likeness, *faka-Tonga* means like the Tongans do, or in the Tongan manner.

hosting and attending feasts, kava drinking, Tongan dancing, giving money to a dancer, singing in church, filling up a guest's plate with a mountain of food, elaborate funerals, mourning in black and rough *ta'ovala*, taking home bags of food from feasts and funerals, going to church, and resting on Sunday. All of these features refer to a system that came into fruition in the nineteenth century and that is actually a hybrid of old Tongan culture, Victorian English Christianity, and political structures from both the Pacific and Europe.

The nineteenth century was a time of concentrated major change in Tonga as virtually everyone became Christian, the islands were united under a lesser chief who became the king and changed the Tongan chiefly system into a constitutional monarchy with a nobility. Commoners were officially emancipated from the demands of chiefs, lesser chiefs found their status demoted to those of commoners, and twenty-two chiefs were elevated to nobility and granted hereditary titles (Campbell 1992; Rutherford 1996; Wood-Ellem 2001). Both Christianity and the monarchy-nobility in Tonga necessarily incorporated many Tongan and Pacific elements as some Tongans retained significant agency during the era of colonialism. Though Tonga was never officially colonized, between the missionaries and political aid, it did not escape Western influence. Crucial for this dissertation is that this is the era people are conjuring when speaking of “the Tongan way” or “traditional Tongan”—a blend of Tongan and Western cultures from the nineteenth century: Christian Tonga.

By contrast, I use the term “the *palangi* way” for features and values Tongans

would describe as *fakapalangi*.<sup>3</sup> Some Tongans (particularly Mormons) would describe these values in positive terms, as modern, progressive, or aspirational for the future of Tongan culture, but often when they are pointed out by others, they are characterized in negative terms. The Western values are rooted in individuality and include capitalist attitudes towards money, self-sufficiency as a goal, individual achievement, and nuclear families as the primary kinship unit. The elements people describe as emblematic of Western values include: greediness with money, rushing around, being independent and free to make their own decisions, being smart and well educated, social problems like homelessness and orphans, not going to church, running successful businesses, being rich, sexual permissiveness, immodesty, being alone, and arrogance or racism towards Tongans.

Of course, the list of Tongan features were ones in which people took pride and were all positive, but many informants have serious complaints about Tongan culture. On the reverse side, the list of qualities associated with Western or *palangi* culture were split between positive and very negative, in ways that often made me feel defensive, or like pointing out to my informants some of the less wonderful things I had noticed about Tongan culture. The split is important because many people think that the adoption of too many Western values will lead to the undoing of Tongan culture and they use the social problems of the Tongan diaspora as evidence of this. Those who wish to adopt some Western approaches (to money in particular) are careful to note that Western culture

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<sup>3</sup> Like *faka-Tonga*, *fakapalangi* means in the manner of white foreigners.

would be best if it were encompassed within Tongan culture.

The contrast my informants were drawing between “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way” speaks to Ira Bashkow’s work *The Meaning of Whitemen: Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World* (2006). In his book, Bashkow outlines how the category of whitemen was continually emerging as a productive tool through which his informants from Papua New Guinea could explain their own culture. Whitemen served as a foil to their own racial category of blackness, but contained within each racial category was a vast range of positive and negative associations about each culture. He argues that investigating how people create “the other” is useful in understanding how they conceptualize themselves and the category of otherness should always be understood within the culture in which it is created. Bashkow additionally asserts that this othering is common: “We could say it is only human, then, for people to construct others in dialectical relation to themselves—as more virtuous or more vice-ridden, more primitive or refined, more natural or ethereal, and so on—always taking the self as the implicit point of reference” (Bashkow 2006: 240). While for the Orokaiva this us/them dichotomy is played out through race and skin tone as the primary difference that contains many other symbols and associations, in Tonga this Tongan-*palangi* dichotomy is symbolically and visually rooted in the motifs of wide and narrow.

### **Kinship, Rank, Church, and Nation**

Kinship is the unspoken thread at the center of discussions of the future of Tongan culture. Tongan kin organization forms the basis of the structure of Tongan society--rang-

ing from how the monarchy and nobility were established, to how churches function in the community, to how people personally interact with one another as relatives and friends. Rank is essential to understanding kinship as it informs patterns of authority, obedience, respect, and exchange.

The primary type of rank analyzed here is *kainga* (extended family) rank, which is based on an individual's position in relation to others in his or her immediate and extended family. One's *kainga* includes not only relatives who are reckoned bilaterally and whose connections are traceable minimally three generations prior, but also relatives who are adopted, generally non-permanently (Wood-Ellem 2001). The guiding principles are: females of the same generation outrank males, and after gender is taken into account, elder outranks younger (Biersack 1996; Douraire-Marsaudon 1996; Kaeppler 1971; Rogers 1977). This pattern extends beyond one's generation in that in relation to Ego, the father's sister is supreme in terms of rank, sacredness, and authority in the family and the mother's brother is lowest (Ibid).

*Kainga* rank also sets patterns of obedience across many social arenas and is the foundation for long-term relationships of material and emotional care that continue to be relevant both within Tonga and abroad across the diaspora (Addo 2013; James 1997; Morton 1996; Small 1997). For example, brothers are supposed to care for their sisters and their sisters' children for their entire lives, giving them gifts of their own accord and responding to requests of animals, food, money, or any kind of help from the sisters and sisters' children. Sisters are responsible for dividing and distributing gifts at occasions like funerals. A demonstration of commitment to this type of family structure is, there-

fore, a commitment to a multitude of ways of being Tongan.

The second type of rank is lineage rank, which takes these principles and applies them to a founding family from which chiefly lineages are understood and ranked in order, such that the lineage descending from the eldest son is supreme (Biersack 1996). The high rank of sisters relative to brothers is mitigated in several ways in the context of lineage rank so that the status of women does not eclipse the status and power of men: first a woman has high rank in her role as a sister to a chiefly man, rather than as a mother or wife; second, at the highest echelons of society where lineage rank matters most, care was taken that chiefly sisters married foreign men to ensure their children did not make claims of higher rank than the children of brothers. Lineage rank can also be manipulated by highlighting certain relatives over others: this requires extensive knowledge of deep genealogy, and of the ways in which both male and female relatives are vital in determining one's rank (Ibid). This type of rank is most relevant to present day nobility or royalty and not to my informants, who are commoners.

The third type of rank is class, which was formerly very simply divided into two categories: chiefly and commoner (Kaepler 1971). Presently the landscape of rank is much more varied, with arguably an emerging middle class and an array of factors that distinguish commoners from one another in terms of social status (Besnier 2009). Class distinction is relevant to my informants, many of whom taught me about status signifiers by complaining about people who were constantly "showing off." Others directly warned me of how "status obsessed" Tongans are and that they are always in competition with one another. The Methodist church provided one of the first opportunities for commoner

families to increase their status and prestige—independent from chiefly-lineage rank—as members pursued careers in church leadership, which effectively built up a parallel rank system wherein different families established and maintained prestige through multi-generational ministry positions (Niumeitolu 1993).

Ranked relationships and Tongan kinship structure operate not only at the level of the immediate *kainga* family networks, but also at the level of the church and the nation in the ways church members and Tongan nationals relate to one another and their leaders. In churches, congregation members (*kainga lotu*) are obligated alongside one's *kainga* to contribute to and participate heavily in funerals for fellow church members. At both the level of the church and the nation, gifts are presented and respect (through wrapping) is directed to the leaders, much as they are in a *kainga* setting to the father and his sister.

Acknowledging and respecting different kin relations within the *kainga* and broadly within the church and nation entails participation in exchange systems that place a great demand on one's financial, food, textile, and time resources. It is this connection that puts Tongan family and social structure in a vulnerable place as some people feel that the extensive obligations are burdensome to a degree that they “hold Tongans back.” The LDS Church provides the clearest alternative to “the Tongan way” of participating in these kinship and exchange systems, first because Mormon kinship is based on the nuclear family—a married mother and father (not the father and the father's sister) as the primary source of care and authority (Cannell 2005; Rogers 1977). Second because the ideas of financial responsibility are strongly, and officially, promoted that encourage saving, capital accumulation, investment, and giving within a clear budget (Ashton 1975).



Third because a different approach that minimizes exchange is modeled to members and the broader community in how Tongan Mormons interact with one another and church leaders.

### **Relatedness and the Materialization of Kinship**

The concept of relatedness in recent kinship theory underscores the post-Schneiderian turn by asserting that families—whether biologically configured or not—are made and not given as natural (Carsten 2000; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Franklin and McKinnon 2001). Scholars have explored the multifaceted work required in creating and maintaining kin relations, which directly relates to many elements of Tongan kinship. The literature on adoption and gay and lesbian kinship has emphasized the primacy of the actions that create kinship—caring, feeding, helping, and cohabitating—over the "natural," biological connections of siblings and parents to children (Hayden 1995; Howell 2003; Modell 1994; Weston 1991). This scholarship examines both how non-biological families are made and how biological connections can be unmade through giving up children to adoption or disowning them. It elucidates that biology alone does not create a family, nor is it always a necessary element in creating a family (Ibid). In many ways, the literature on relatedness already speaks strongly to many elements of Tongan kinship, namely the extremely prevalent adoption that affects every Tongan family I know, and more germane to this dissertation, it speaks to the work of giving one's food, textiles, time, and money in creating and maintaining kin ties. On the reverse side, not participating in these exchange systems can unmake kin relations—spoken about as "forgetting one's family."

New kinship theories also look at how kin relations are materialized. This focus takes a variety of forms from the analysis of non-genetic substances—such as land or food—as the material that connects people (Bamford 2009; Carsten 1995; McKinnon 2016), to the relationships formed between people through collective labor, or between people and things through production (Bear 2013; Bodenhorn 2000; Bolton 2003; Henare 2005), or finally to the inseparable connection between kinship and memories that are rooted physically in land or objects (Empson 2007). My dissertation looks at how the Tongan kinship system is materialized both through distinct forms of giving and dress. People wear *ta'ovala* as a sign of respect and to signify their obedience to family, church, and nation; resistance and change to this all-encompassing kinship system are also expressed materially as people choose not to wear *ta'ovala*.

### **Exchange Relations**

Giving textiles, food, cash, and labor is a key way in which Tongans demonstrate love, respect, obedience, and relative position within a family, church, and nation (Evans 2003; James 1997). Formal prestations are a frequent and pervasive aspect of life in Tonga, whether these take place between key relatives during funerals, or entail elaborate contributions to churches and schools for fundraisers, conferences, and celebrations, or annual gifts to the king on his birthday (Evans 2003). There are also copious daily informal exchanges—gifts and sharing of food, favors, and money between relatives and friends—as well as remittances, which make up a large (but possibly decreasing) share of Tonga's economy, from relatives in the diaspora (Evans 2003; James 1997; Lee 2006).

The asymmetric, generalized exchange system in Tonga is based on the rules of *kainga* rank that not only determine the relatives towards whom respect and obedience is directed, but also specify that sisters and father's sisters can ask for anything (and expect to receive it) from brothers and brother's children (Biersack 1996; Kaeppler 1971). There is also a relationship of formal giving between the mother's brother and the father's sister, such that during life crisis rituals the mother's brother (or her *kainga* generally) is expected to bear the burden of giving food and textiles and the father's sister receives these items and distributes them to her *kainga*. The reciprocity is understood system-wide, as every family takes the role of givers and receivers-distributors at different times. Gifts are always moving up in rank and the ability to distribute is a privilege of a person in a position of high status. This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

The role of money in Tongan exchanges is increasingly crucial as there is pressure during formal occasions to give not only Tongan textiles and food, which take a significant amount of work to prepare, but also to purchase imported decorations (fabric, cellophane, plastic flowers, dishes), to make foreign foods with expensive ingredients (salads, desserts, casseroles), and to give large amounts of cash (Addo 2009; Veys 2009). The burden of giving in formal and informal exchanges is experienced as a strain on a family's material and financial wealth, its food resources, and its time and energy through the work it takes in preparation.

*Kainga* kin organization and the extensive demands of the exchange system come into sharp relief in settings where Western definitions of family and resource management dominate. This is apparent in the diaspora where ideologies of responsible financial

planning discourage generous remitting practices associated with caring for one's family (Addo 2009; James 1997; Lee 2009). This contrast is also present in Tonga itself through diasporic connections, through development initiatives, and through institutions like the LDS Church, which advocates both subtly and overtly for a Western notion of family and financial management (Cannell 2013). For instance, Mormon nuclear families are encouraged to sit together during church services rather than sitting anywhere they like with friends, cousins, or relatives. Doctrinally, the primacy of the nuclear family is exemplified as marital spouses and their children are "sealed" to one another on earth and for eternity. Although Cannell (2005) has explored how this configures in Mormon imagination as experiencing heaven with one's extended family through generations of "sealings," it nevertheless places marriage, rather than siblingship, as the foundational kinship unit. Extensive and burdensome exchange is discouraged by the LDS Church by institutionally not participating in it: members give money in a straightforward-manner through explicit tithing—which also requires them to keep close track of their finances—and their socializing and celebrating is centered on church dances rather than expensive, labor-intensive feasts.

### **Material Culture and Dress**

Textile production and collecting has long been a point of pride and national identity for Tongans and, as objects, they are compelling because they—particularly leaf-woven textiles rather than tapa—can be mundane household objects like floor coverings, traditional gifts and treasured family heirlooms, or clothing used to wrap people's bodies.

While wearing *ta'ovala* is presently explained in terms of respect, it also belongs to the motif of wrapping or containment in the anthropology of ancient Polynesia, where it is closely connected with the concepts of *mana*, *tapu*, and rank. Highly ranked people were so ranked based on genealogical proximity to demi-god ancestors. Because this connection to demi-gods meant that high ranking people truly belonged to the realm of gods (*po*) and not the realm of humans (*ao*), it provided the source of *mana* for the elite, and thus meant that highly ranked people were extremely dangerous to commoners, especially during times of passage between the realms, such as births and deaths (Biersack 1996; Kaeppler 1999; Shore 1989). Foreigners, around the time of Captain Cook's arrival in Tonga in 1773, *were also* considered powerful, dangerous, and desirable as they were thought to come from the realm of gods. Because *mana* could harm others, the dangerous power of *mana* was elaborately contained through restrictions (*tapus*) and by wrapping those with great *mana* and rank in textiles or tattoos, which mediated its dangers (Gell 1993; Kaeppler 1999; Sahlins 1985; Shore 1989; Tcherkézoff 2003). Wrapping was also used to invite or reveal the presence of divinity in people and objects (Babadzan 2003; Kuchler 2005; Shore 1989; Tcherkézoff 2003; Valeri 1985).

Despite the contemporary prevalence of handmade, leaf-fiber textiles, and new-material versions of *ta'ovala* in everyday and ceremonial life, and in funerals, wrapping has been most often studied in terms of their roles as heirlooms, gifts, commodities, and their oscillation between these categories (Addo and Besnier 2008; James 1997; Kaeppler 1999; Weiner 1992). Weiner (1992) and Kaeppler (1999) in particular looked at how the finest versions of these textiles in Samoa and Tonga were named and passed through gen-

erations, or strategically circulated between lineages, and how lineages asserted their prominence by being associated with these textiles. Others like Henare (2005), Herda (1999), and Addo (2013) have demonstrated the close relationship between the production of these textiles and enacting kin relations by connecting to both ancestors and living relatives.

The use of handmade textiles in wrapping has rarely been the focus of anthropological attention, but has been addressed in the context of church attendance in the diaspora and in relation to the 2006 royal funeral. The purpose of wearing *ta'ovala* is explained by those who wear it as a way of expressing one's duty towards—and respect and love for—Tonga and its rulers (Addo 2003), as a way of signifying kin relations at funerals, or as a way of protecting people and spaces from supernatural forces (Veys 2009). In this dissertation I focus on the use of these textiles as they dress bodies and I examine their material specificity in order to understand the meaning they have in relation to contrasting (and changing) values of kinship organization. I also examine the resistance to wrapping and the types of dress that take prominence in the absence of *ta'ovala*, including *palangi*-style clothing such as pants rather than *tupenu* (a tailored wrap skirt) for men and sometimes women, shorter skirts and dress hems for women, and tighter silhouettes of clothing.

The anthropological literature on dress explores a vast array of theoretical paradigms, but my dissertation is situated in work that considers the role of dress in political, religious, or nationalist movements. For instance, scholars both pre- and post-9/11 have looked at the use of veiling and how various iterations of Islamic modest dress are used to

symbolize and perform devotion to national and global Islam in the face of anti-Muslim attitudes and secular regimes, and to counter claims that veiling is the paramount symbol for women's subordination (El Guindi 1999; Tarlo 2010; White 1999). These works focus on the choice, mainly of women, to dress modestly and to use dress as an assertion of Islamic modernity and identity, and of resistance to Westernization. Tarlo (1996) explores dress in India in the twentieth century and examines how individual agency and clothing choices—draped versus tailored clothes—were used as political statements to align wearers with India or colonial influences. Here I investigate the role of dress in relation to the contrasting kinship-economic systems that characterize “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way”; I specifically look at how dress may be used as a statement to mark a commitment to “the Tongan way” or to critique the burdens of Tongan culture and highlight a shift towards *palangi* values.

## Fieldwork

My research took place between February 2014 and July 2015 in Vava’u, Tonga. I began fieldwork staying in a house with a multi-generational family and remained there for six months before moving to a house by myself, where I lived for almost a year. In my first house I lived with my Tongan language teacher Tevita,<sup>4</sup> his wife 'Ofa, their four children, and 'Ofa's parents, who owned the house. They were all Catholic and three of the four adults were teachers. Through this family I was exposed to a broad network of peo-

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<sup>4</sup> All names of my informants have been changed to pseudonyms for privacy. Photos depicting people are used with permission.

ple either through the Catholic church and school or through their relatives. I had many opportunities to observe daily Tongan family life and gain an understanding of how parents interact with children, siblings with cousins, and children with specific aunts and uncles; and I was able to witness the overwhelmingly frequent gifts of food that came into and left the house. I was also able to attend Mass every week with the family as well as various events like funerals, family reunions, and school functions.

Changing houses after six months changed my daily socialization, taking me out of Tongan family life and into a social group with young, single people, men and women, both Tongan and *palangi*. In my new house and with friends in similar life stages to my own, my data shifted. The biggest shift was that I was no longer observing a family's daily life, and the people I spent time with had more time to spend together and talk than busy, working parents did. Although I worried I would not be invited to anything "Tongan" anymore, that fear was never realized, and I had plenty of invitations to events from my original networks of informants and my new friends. The small cohort of Peace Corps volunteers I overlapped with also became a helpful source of friendship, as well as a valuable resource in expanding my informant networks to villages with which I otherwise had no connection.

The most constant element throughout my fieldwork was my "apprenticeship" under my weaving teacher Mahina and her weaving group in the village Talau. She taught me to process pandanus and weave mats with *kīe* leaves, which was the primary type of pandanus she used. Although the group felt like mine because I worked with them almost daily, I was not a full cooperative member—partially because I was not fast enough at



weaving to keep up with the daily requirements, but possibly also because I was not embedded enough within a Tongan family to have access to leaves and a need for accumulating a collection of textiles. I spent so much time with the women in my weaving group and with Mahina in particular, that they became good friends. Mahina invited me to everything, it seemed, and her family was constantly giving me food and being extremely kind and welcoming.

My primary methods of research were participant observation, informal interviews, and semi-structured interviews. As noted above, the phase of participant observation seemed the heaviest in the beginning when I was living with the Finau family and observing daily household life. However, participant observation certainly continued throughout fieldwork, in my weaving group and in the vast array of events to which I was invited: funerals, first- and twenty-first birthday parties, beauty pageants, religious holidays, church conference feasts, Mormon dances, family reunions, national-royal events, school alumni reunions, fundraisers, kava clubs, sports competitions, and “small” family feasts.

The number of informal interviews I conducted, although also occurring throughout the duration of fieldwork, greatly jumped in frequency after I moved to my own small house and became friends with more people my own age, who were also unmarried and mostly without children. These friends spent a lot of time at my house and my next-door neighbor Emily’s house, talking and hanging out for hours, sometimes every day. Most of my interviews (both semi-structured and informal) were in English, though I did conduct some in Tongan with the help of a different Tongan language teacher as a translator, or on

my own when possible. My younger friends spoke fluent English, having learned it in school and bolstered their skills in time abroad, employed in jobs where it was required at least some of the time, and through friendships and occasionally romantic relationships with native English speakers.

My semi-structured interviews were conducted often with people I did not know well, but were set up for me with the help of other friends and informants. Sometimes this was because I was looking for someone who fit a specific category (e.g., Mormon converts) or I needed someone with special knowledge (e.g., Tongan myths) or I needed a greater representation from a particular group (usually Methodists). Nevertheless, I really enjoyed these interviews and people were generally so nice to me that, afterwards, it felt like my own network had grown.

### **Dissertation Chapters**

The next chapter, “Bodies,” explores the symbolism of wide and narrow as it is seen through people’s physical and dressed bodies. Here I examine the meaning of fatness in the Pacific at all levels of social strata, as well as the cultural events that contribute to fatness, namely feasting. Additionally, through an analysis of wideness in terms of bodies, I look at the historic and present day meaning of wrapping in *ta’ovala* as it widens a person’s silhouette and restricts movement in ways similar to extreme corpulence. Narrowness is explored through the processes of people losing weight, through diet and exercise, and the various ways in which weight loss is encouraged and promoted. Finally, as the counterpart to *ta’ovala*-wrapped bodies, tight-fitting clothing or dress that

accentuates smallness is analyzed along with the occasions in which this type of dress is appropriate.

Chapter three looks at the Free Wesleyan Church Conference, marked most prominently by a week of feasts multiple times every day, that took place in Vava'u during my fieldwork. This event highlights the multiplicity of meanings connected to the motif of wideness in my dissertation: the diaspora returned to Tonga; wide networks of family and friends were called upon to help feast-table hosts prepare for the feasts; huge amounts of money were spent; food was redistributed to the networks of family and friends; people were physically making their bodies larger through feasting, and everyone and everything was wrapped. This event also sparked conversation and critique on Tongan culture and revealed the complexities of people simultaneously being proud of Tongan celebrations and concerned that they are “keeping Tongans poor.”

“Church and Money,” the fourth chapter, considers people’s experiences with the different churches in Tonga, particularly in relation to money. Informants explain how churches request offerings from their congregants, how church money is used, and the impressions people have of the other local churches. The different churches also take varying active roles in advising their congregants on how to manage their own finances. For the Methodists, people are encouraged to “not make money their God” like *palangis* do, but to keep their generous spirit in regard to money and not feel such strong ownership over it. The Mormons, by contrast, are encouraged to carefully budget their finances and responsibly spend and give according to the budget. This chapter also reviews the history of the three main churches in Tonga—the Methodists, Catholics, and Mormons—

keeping their relationships to money at the forefront in order to elucidate present day practices.

Chapter five, “Mormon Dances,” stands as the complement to the Wesleyan Conference chapter, as the motif of narrowness is clearly seen in all areas of bodies, family, and money. By contrast to the feasting of the Wesleyan Conference, Mormons socialize through exercising and not eating, presumably making their bodies physically smaller. Dances are not a time to wear *ta’ovala*, but are a time to wear tight-fitted clothing. Dances also work as a microcosm of Mormon values where the nuclear family and heterosexual, eternal marriage is celebrated. Likewise dances are hosted by the church and are inexpensive for people to attend.

The sixth chapter on family, rank, and money investigates the intricacies of family relations and obligations people have to one another. It considers how kin relationships have changed since the emancipation of commoners—specifically how the institution of *fatongia* (a chief’s ability to request anything from those below him) has transitioned from a chiefly practice to a family practice. This chapter also looks at people’s relationships to objects, particularly food, and how this loose ownership and easy sharing translates to a unique morality towards money wherein the same attitudes (of ownership and sharing) are favored.

Finally, chapter seven explores funerals and weaving together. Funerals are the main Tongan event that is most “at risk” for change. People are fed up with the expense and work of funerals and some people are actively planning and putting into practice different ways of memorializing their relatives. As funerals change, weaving will also

change since funerals are the single most textile-centric event in Tonga. This chapter also explores how big funerals, smaller funerals, and weaving groups align with “the Tongan way” or “the *palangi* way.”

## Chapter 2

### Bodies

My first avenue of exploration in terms of the wide and narrow framework that pervades this dissertation (and correlates with the values of “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way”), is through bodies in Tonga. Anne Becker, who writes about body image and ideals in Fiji, argues that core cultural values may be encoded in people’s physical bodies (1995). With that in mind, I want to explore wide bodies and narrow bodies, specifically: physically large or even fat bodies, as well as dress that enhances the size of a person; and thin bodies, and dress that diminishes one’s size or fits closely.

#### **Fat Bodies / Big Bodies**

I met up with Lydia and Hi’iaka in Vava’u after being in Tongatapu for a few weeks. It was my first trip to Tonga and I met these two women on the plane from Fiji. They were also grad students; both were from Hawaii and were deeply connected to their own Hawaiian heritage. Lydia and Hi’iaka were very involved in the project of Hawaiian language revitalization and had just spent years gaining fluency. We had an instant connection that was further cemented in Vava’u, drinking in the guest house where we stayed and marveling about the attention from very attractive men we had all been getting.

I took a drink of cheap beer and said “I mean... at home, guys like *that* do not hit on me.” Lydia laughed loudly and said “Okay, I was waiting to see if you’d say that! You are like us!” Hi’iaka added “Lucky for us, their opinions on bodies have not been subjected to colonization. Thank God!” she laughed. Then she proposed a theory to us: “maybe it fits into a male-female thing here. On the one hand, you have village bodies”—the euphemistic term that we had given to muscular guys who were just everywhere, and that we had assumed was from the physical work they all seemed to participate in to some degree. She continued “like men are supposed to be hard.” Lydia and I laughed again. “And women are supposed to be soft, to complement that!” We agreed this was all working in our favor; then Lydia declared: “We can’t leave! We found the place where smoking’ hot guys like fat women!”

Granted, there is a vast range of possible reasons why we were getting this attention, but even with that in mind, there *was* something different about fatness and bodies that we all noticed. We were also primed for this difference and came in with some assumptions about it. I know Hi’iaka at least anticipated that Tongans experienced a softer cultural blow from colonialism than Hawaiians had endured. I do not know what Lydia was thinking, but she did say that the very familiar body pressure she felt at home was not present in the same way in Tonga. As for myself, I had known “obesity” was an “issue” (according to international, Western-oriented metrics) in Tonga because Pacific Island nations occasionally ended up in news stories about obesity and they regularly sit at the top of lists of “fattest countries in the world.” However, I did not know or expect the attitudes towards and about bodies I encountered.

There is a deeply rooted appreciation of large bodies in Tonga and across the Pacific, in part because a large body is associated with the distinction of high rank. On one hand, fatness has historically signified high status in many different times and locations because it is a physical manifestation of a person's access to food when it may be scarce for most people (Kulick and Meneley 2005). While this environmental explanation was probably a factor historically for the fatness of the elite in Oceania, Alfred Gell suggests other reasons for the association of corpulence and high rank or chiefliness (1993). For Gell, a central purpose for being fat historically in Polynesia was to distinguish aristocratic bodies from those of commoners, and to that end, aristocratic children were subjected to explicit fattening regimes throughout Polynesia (Ibid). Both Gell and Valerio Valeri also emphasize how fatness in chiefly people intentionally disables them, as being immobile was the highest point of etiquette for high-ranking Polynesians (Gell 1993; Valeri 1985). Gell refers to this motif of seated chiefs—who are the embodiment of gods and thus divinely free from desire—as “disabled grandeur” (1993). The motif of seated chiefs comes from the highest chiefs; *matapule* (talking chiefs, in Tongan) are lower ranked and do not embody the same highest level of status.

Anne Becker investigated bodily meanings in Fiji and explored another reason big bodies are valued that is not based in the idea of chiefly “disabled grandeur,” but rather conveys a person's potential contributions to the community and reflects the care they have already received by their family (1995). She emphasized not only how core cultural values are encoded in people's bodies, but also contrasted Western and Fijian views of the body. The significant difference between the two perspectives was both about size and



how Western bodies are reflections of the individual while Fijians bodies are reflections of the community. Becker's research resonated with my own and it was almost constantly on my mind during fieldwork.

My own body served as a useful tool in research, and per the advice of everyone, I took notes on the things people said to me that struck me as odd. The unprovoked comments I received on my appearance were always notable, in part because they were very different from what I was used to hearing. At home in the US getting compliments on my curly hair was fairly common. In Tonga, however, I gathered that my hair came across as untidy, messy, and undone. My body is mostly unremarkable in the US, but in Tonga there were many compliments from men and women, so presumably they were meant both flirtatiously and platonically. Many people told me I had a "Tongan body," which would lead to suggestions that I learn Tongan dances or questions about my heritage. At home no one would dare utter a word to me directly if they noticed I was gaining weight, but certainly some people would compliment any noticeable weight loss. In Tonga, my friends delighted in me getting fatter during and after the Wesleyan Church Conference and freely told me this. I think they liked it because they knew I had been invited to many feasts and that I was being properly dazzled by Tongan hospitality. The best and most frequent compliments were on my "round" calves. I found these compliments so delightful because as soon as I started dissecting my body into parts that should be hated, changed, fixed, or "downplayed" through dress (maybe around age twelve), my round calves were at the top of that list, so this was quite a paradigm shift.

For Becker, in Fiji the specific values that are encoded in body shape ideals (large, well-formed bodies, large calves) are collective care, social connectedness, and physical strength. A well-formed body is a well-fed body; the sturdiness and strength of such a body for men and women convey an ability to work and therefore contribute to a family and community (1995). In Tonga, the specific values associated with bigger bodies, I argue, connect attitudes about family and money. People recognize, respect, and care for their extended families by providing and sharing both food and money. Big bodies convey this attitude of good Tongan values of generosity: giving and receiving food, not paying close attention to needs or personal desires regarding diet, but fostering relationships through food. Money, like food, should not be hoarded, obsessed over, or worried about, but people should have casual connections to it and give it out generously to the church, family, and friends. Largeness in bodies further underscores values of abundance and ease, as well as a concern with elevating relationships over personal needs.

Hi'iaka put it well when she said that the aesthetic system had not been subject to colonization. People's appreciation of fatness in Tonga—whether in an obese chief or a large, well-fed and well-formed body—seemed so sincere and unaffected, it was not like people were trying to be inclusive or open-minded. Even the casualness in how people talked about body shapes and sizes was striking. How is it possible that you could call someone “fat” and that not be rude? In Tonga, it was just as normal and unremarkable as calling someone “tall.” Clearly part of the reason is because being fat in Tonga is not a “sin” like it is in the US, and also, like Becker observed, one's body is not a reflection of the individual and their achievements, but of the community.

## Wrapped Bodies

Easter was one of the few times when I was dressed up in a proper *ta'ovala* and not just a *kiekie* (a handmade skirt with decorative strips, intended to be worn also over clothing to add decoration and elevate the formality of an outfit); although *kiekie* were usually handmade and sometimes out of natural materials, they were simpler and less formal than a woven mat (see Photo 2.1). Everyone in the family in the house where I was staying had new outfits made for Easter. The women had colorful, satin, ankle-length maxi skirts and matching short-sleeve tailored blouses that extended to just above the knee—this outfit is also called a *pule taha* and is the most standard ensemble to wear with a *ta'ovala* (see Photos 1.1 and 2.1). The men wore new dark-colored *tupenu*, a tailored wrap skirt, and white collared shirts. This outfit is the standard base for men's formal attire and can be further decorated with a tie, blazer, or leaf and flower necklace (like a Hawaiian *lei*; *kahoa* in Tonga).

The Saturday night before Easter, Kolina, the eldest daughter in the family, and a senior in high school, told me that everyone at church would be in their nicest, newest clothes. This was the most important Mass, she told me, while she pinned my hair back and picked out jewelry to complement the purple dress. She also picked out the *ta'ovala* I was going to wear and, when she asked her grandma about it, the grandma brought out stacks of mats that she leafed through until she narrowed it down to two. 'Ofa, Kolina's mom, tied the *ta'ovala* on me and told me to stand with my legs apart a little bit so that I would still be able to walk when the mat was on. She tied it so tight I felt like I was getting sucked into a corset and it was still hard to move, since the stiff mat extended from

waist to mid-thigh. It was April and still very hot outside, even at night, as summer in the Southern Hemisphere was ending. Soon the weather would cool for the winter, but the heat and humidity made this formal attire feel even less comfortable. After we were all looking our best and wrapped up tightly in mats, adorned with *kahoa*, scented with lotions and perfumes, we split up and climbed into two cars and headed to the church.

It was dark outside and people were passing out lit candles with paper holders. Mass was always crowded, but this one was extra full and everyone *did* look great, as Kolina predicted. Inside, the church was extra decorated with barkcloth lining some of the walls, everything was lit by candlelight, and the statues of Jesus and Mary that I was used to staring at during Mass were wrapped in mats tonight. Jesus! Wrapped in a mat!

Gell and Valeri both drew parallels between fatness and wrapped bodies (they make one appear larger and can also restrict movement), but wrapping has additional, supernatural significance. A wrapped body can highlight the presence of sacredness, draw it in, and protect people from the dangers of it. In addition to physically constraining a person, wrapping is the collectively accepted sign of the god's presence (Babadzan 2003; Tcherkézoff 2003; Valeri 1985) and is a very common motif across the Pacific from religiously potent wrapped idols to wrapped people, whose wrappings help them to preserve and accumulate power. For Gell, wrapping is mostly about manipulating dangerous sacredness (1993; 1995). Not only does wrapping draw this sacredness in toward an object or a highly ranked person, but it contains it and keeps it from dispersing to people who are unprepared for it—those of lower ranks. Gell also argues that the wrappings themselves can become suffused with sacredness and in turn become empowered objects

(Ibid). This long association with the gods, sacredness, and high rank has helped to cement the motif of wrapping into the aesthetic system in Tonga and wrapping is the most acceptable and presentable way to decorate anything (Veys 2009).

The wrapped person (or object) is itself of very high rank because only a highly ranked person with a lineage to the gods could be an appropriate and safe vessel for sacredness (Babadzan 2003; Gell 1995; Valeri 1985). I do not think this can possibly be the explanation for current wrapping in Tonga as people of all ranks and statuses wear *ta'ovala* and do so because it was codified by Queen Salote in 1953. She required this dress to boost nationalism, cultural pride, and preservation of Tongan art (Addo 2013). However, it is possible that she also made this decision to emphasize a flattening of rank or an aspirational equality in the “Tongan way,” by elevating commoners rather than demoting chiefs as her predecessor did. From her biography, it is clear that she was concerned about the precarious position of monarchs in the early twentieth century and in particular she was greatly impacted by events of the Russian Revolution and the violence towards royals and aristocrats (Wood-Ellem 2001). Queen Salote’s fear of a similar fate influenced many decisions during her rule, including, possibly that of standardizing wearing *ta'ovala* for all Tongans, something that had a long association with high rank.

Queen Salote’s legacy with woven goods extends beyond requiring everyone to wear *ta'ovala*. She was known for taking a keen interest in the preservation of Tongan culture and one way this manifested was through the weaving and handicraft cooperatives she established in the 1920s (Wood-Ellem 2001). Craft textile production varies between the island groups, but Tongatapu, the main island, is known for barkcloth (see Photos 2.2

and 2.3). Vava'u, which is north of Tongatapu and where I did my fieldwork, is known for weaving (see Photo 2.4). Even the establishment of handicraft cooperatives by the queen had an element of rank-leveling. Prior to the emancipation of commoners in 1862, only chiefly women would actually own the textiles produced for them by commoners (Herda 1999; James 1988; Small 1995). In the current system, like in my weaving group, for example, women trade labor and rotate as “the chiefly woman”—meaning in a rotation each woman has “her day” once where she does not have to weave or work at all. In a group with five women Mondays are for Mahina’s projects and the four group members will all weave her mats while Mahina provides lunch and maybe runs errands or does chores at her own house. Then it rotates and Mahina joins the group on Tuesday when it is Tahi’s day to bring lunch and her mats for everyone to weave. It goes through the whole group so that everyone who has bought in with their labor, is also the recipient of group labor. While my group mostly wove large, gift mats for collections or eventual use in exchange, structurally they are the same as mats worn as *ta’ovala* (examined in greater detail in Chapter 7).

This is all to say that when people are wrapping in *ta’ovala*, they are calling up many references. It is about old Pacific ideas of sacredness and rank, as well as traditional constitutional-era ideas about nationality, Tongan pride, and the emancipation of commoners from the oppressive old systems. Wearing *ta’ovala* also recalls specific ideas articulated by Queen Salote of Tongan values of love, respect, and obedience to God, country, and family. The objects themselves—hand-woven mats out of processed, locally grown pandanus leaves—embody kinship relationships, since the mats either belong to

relatives, were made by relatives, or in some cases have already become heirlooms, having been passed down through families for several generations (Henare 2005; Weiner 1992). For all of my weaving friends, their leaves were grown for them by their husbands or other family and were never purchased. They told me it's important to know the source of the leaves in order to trust the quality. Mahina's husband was from Ha'apai originally and his family grew pandanus leaves for her. It was a point of pride to have leaves from Ha'apai, and I learned that each of the northern island groups claims to grow the best, the brightest and whitest, kie leaves. Of course, they do not grow white—the sea water bleaches them and the sun dries them—so there is a melding of the land, the sea, and the sky that people wear on their bodies.

The times and places when people wrap themselves in *ta'ovala* are also meaningful: to services in the traditional churches—Methodist and Catholic; to work if people work in schools, the government, or certain businesses; and to some weddings and most funerals.

### **Weight Loss / Small Bodies**

Queen Salote's son became King Tupou IV and he was first made notorious by his weight and later for financial scandals; he ruled from 1965 to 2006. From his obituary in the *New York Times*: “for most of his reign, the king cut a gargantuan figure. In 1976 he was reported to be the world's heaviest king, at 460 pounds. Late in life, however, he lost almost 200 pounds through dieting and exercise” (Kaufman 2006). All four of the obituaries I consulted mentioned his physical body—he was also tall, at six feet and five inch-

es (Bain 2006; Cowell 2006; Fonua 2006; Kaufman 2006).

The king became a champion of “healthy weight loss” for his citizens in the 1990s allowing and supporting the Tonga National Food and Nutrition Committee to organize national weight loss competitions between 1995 and 1997 (Englberger et al. 1999). Winners received their prizes from the king himself and the competitions emphasized how *healthy* it was to lose weight, in hopes that the public would have positive associations with weight loss rather than associations with illness (Becker 1995; Englberger et al. 1999). The educational component to the competition encouraged eating a traditional Tongan diet rather than an imported one and increasing exercise, and focused efforts on education about obesity and its relationship to non-communicable diseases (Englberger et al. 1999). The king’s body transformation marked a turning point in Tonga in attitudes towards bodies. Although people still showed a preference for bigger bodies (Ibid), the king’s weight loss and related national efforts provided a medicalized language for talking about fatness: you could now be obese according to metrics and official charts. In some ways, a medicalized approach to weight loss was the only acceptable one for those who wanted to lose weight in a culture that otherwise valued corpulence positively.

One day I was weaving at Mahina’s house instead of the hall—multi-purpose buildings or “halls” with open floor space for sitting are in every village and are often used by weaving groups during the day and kava clubs at night—because our group was on a break, but Mahina wanted to work on her own mats and I wanted as much practice as I could get. I laid down to rest and stretch my back and pretended to suddenly notice how fat I was getting. This was pretend because I knew exactly how fat I was getting



since my clothes were increasingly tighter—and that could not be blamed on the laundry since I was hand-washing my clothes in cold water and hanging them to dry. I had an idea though: I declared, in a friendly-bonding way, that I needed to lose weight, and I thought maybe if I announced it to Mahina it could be easier to do and people would not make me eat all kinds of extra food, or if I declined food in our weaving group then Mahina would have my back and could tell them I'm trying to lose weight and they'd understand and not be offended.

Instead, Mahina indignantly asked me “Who told you to lose weight? The doctor? The nurse?”

I was so surprised that I just laughed and said “No one! But my clothes are too tight, nothing fits anymore. And look at my stomach!”

She promptly dismissed my announcement of intending to lose weight and told me I just needed new clothes and that I should tell the seamstress to make my new dresses a little bigger, like I was a child who needed “room to grow.” But she was right and I did need that room to grow since I continued to gain weight.

The message that Tongans need to lose weight for better health is coming loud and clear from government sources. Both islands I have spent time on in Tonga—Vava'u and Tongatapu—were peppered with government-sponsored billboards encouraging people to exercise thirty minutes per day, five days per week. These billboards pictured average-looking Tongan women in t-shirts smiling and walking together. This same “thirty minutes per day, five days per week” campaign was repeated in radio ads and on t-shirts. Some of the churches also offered opportunities to exercise. City Impact, an evangelical

church, had Zumba classes a few times per week, and all the LDS Churches properties had multi-sport areas that were used for basketball, tennis, volleyball, and of course dances. Vava'u had a rugby league, school track competitions, and a newly formed women's soccer league, but somehow sports and exercise seemed more accessible to men than women.

As opposed as Mahina was to the idea of me losing weight, my waitress girlfriends accepted my declarations of weight loss as friends at home usually did: a noble effort and a very understandable goal. Maybe they were just used to hearing white women express desires to lose weight and I was playing a familiar role for them; or maybe it was their multiple friendships with insecure *palangi* women that made them see themselves and their own bodies differently. But these friends did not just accept what I said; we also bonded over weight issues and strategized together on what to do them. We took our bodies on as a responsibility, something to cultivate, if only our discipline and willpower were strong enough for the task.

Talia was my main ally in this effort. She had grown up in Tonga, but had lived in Fiji with her Tongan husband and three of their daughters while he was working on his degree at University of the South Pacific. Talia told me she was skinnier there and it helped that she was doing all the cooking and it was only for their little family. "It's hard," she added "with everyone else around and different people cooking all kinds of things." I agreed and told her how easy it is to find healthy food at home.

"In Suva you could get this tea," she laughed "it's diet tea, but it just makes you poop everything out."

I laughed and said maybe one of the shops has it here. She told me they do not and that she had checked. “Green tea is supposed to be good for losing weight too,” I added. “I think I saw it in one of the shops a while ago, maybe we can find it again. If I see it, I’ll buy you a box!”

“We should eat rice too. It’s better than taro and ‘*ufi* (a type of yam) and bread-fruit. But that’s the problem! No one wants to eat rice and no one cooks rice.” I had heard from other people in Tonga too that rice was “better for weight loss” than Tongan starch vegetables.

“I want to go for more walks,” I said “but the dogs are so scary and it gets really hot.”

“Oh yeah,” she said. “You just have to throw a rock at them.”

“I don’t know, some of them look like they’d bite you anyway.”

Talia laughed “and you have to walk in the morning, early, before it gets hot. We can go together. Come to my house and we can walk up Mount Talau. If we do it every day, that’s really good exercise. We can go before Lio goes to work and while the kids are still sleeping. Do you want to come? I really need to lose weight... I’ve gotten so fat since we moved back from Fiji.”

“Me too! I’ve gotten so fat since coming to Tonga. I have to do something!”

She laughed and said “I know! I can see. You used to be like this,” she gestured with her hands close together, “and now you’re like this” she moved her hands apart. I laughed, but it was not genuine.

I agreed to the early morning walks, but I only followed through a few times.

Talia kept the habit a little longer with her neighbor, but then admitted that it was hard to wake up that early, especially if her children had kept her up at night.

### **Tight Clothes**

While Talia was fully on board with my minimal weight loss efforts, Amanaki, my neighbor and another friend my age was trying hard to give me style advice, which almost always involved tighter clothes. My standard weaving outfit was the most offensive to her and she told me I looked like an old woman and it made me look fatter. It was essentially an outfit for exercising—leggings and a t-shirt—but with a sarong tied around my waist to be safely modest enough. She wanted me to lose the sarong so I could show off my legs and my butt.

“Who am I showing off for?” I asked her, “my weaving group?!”

“No! All the boys in town who see you walking from here to Talau. It’s a long walk, maybe your future husband is watching for you!”

My neighbor Emily was in the Peace Corps and she was Amanaki’s best friend. She interjected “Kalo has to dress like that—she probably has rules like the Peace Corps, we are supposed to fit in. You can do whatever you want because you’re Tongan.” Amanaki rolled her eyes in mock-exhaustion and reminded me and Emily that she was just trying to help me find a boyfriend.

Amanaki worked at a cafe popular with the tourists and expats, lived at home with

her parents, and went to Catholic church. During the off-season for tourism,<sup>5</sup> when the restaurant business was slow, she traveled to Australia for three months to spend time with her cousins and family, experience living in Australia, and go shopping. Her cosmopolitan life both required and enabled her to have such a varied wardrobe including skinny jeans, form-fitting dresses, modest *pule taha*, a range of *ta'ovala*, all-black outfits for funerals and mourning to casual clothes for work.

Amanaki, Emily, and Emily's boyfriend Valita were at my little house a lot (later in fieldwork when I lived by myself) and they were there to answer my questions about clothes when I had somewhere new to go. The women in my weaving group asked me to serve kava when their husbands' turn for hosting rolled around. I always accepted, although towards the end of my fieldwork the novelty wore off and I began to dread it because it always meant late nights and it was exhausting to try to understand the kava-slurred Tongan the men would speak to me, and their cigarette smoke made my eyes hurt. Amanaki is the one who brought me Bailey's to drink before I left to serve kava, "to make it more fun" she told me. She said that if she had vodka she would have brought that to give me in a water bottle to take, but she did not have any. She also told me to start saying no and to just tell them I don't have time.

"Serving kava is not a good way to find a boyfriend." Amanaki told me. "All the men are married or old, or they might lie to you about being married. Plus, you don't want someone who drinks kava, you want someone who drinks beer." Nevertheless,

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<sup>5</sup> The tourist season in Vava'u coincides with the best times to sail and swim with whales during Tonga's winter, April through October.

Amanaki, Emily, and Valita were there to approve or disapprove of my kava outfits, which had to somehow strike the right balance of conservative and stylish, just in case it was a good place to find a boyfriend.

When I was invited to Mormon dances, the three of them were there to weigh in, pick things out, loan me clothes, and spray me down with perfume before I left. Even though I had been to Mormon dances before, I always felt like I was getting everything wrong in Tonga when it came to clothes (and many things). I asked them what kind of look I should try for. Emily said “kind of like what you’d wear to the club, but not quite. You know all those Mormon girls are gonna be in their pencil skirts.”

Valita asked her what a pencil skirt was and Emily explained: “It’s tight on the *mu’i*” (hips and bottom) as she gestured a straight line down the sides of her legs, “and they’re short, to the knees.” Valita nodded, “Oh, right! I know what you mean. Yes Kalo! Where are your sexy pencil skirts for the Mormon dance?”

Mormons stood out in Tonga for their clothes, not just for dances, but for church as well. On one of my first trips to Tonga someone told me that anyone can tell what church people go to just by looking at how they are dressed. He then told me that Mormons were the most obvious because they dress like *palangis*. Mormons did look a little like *palangis*, . . . or, really, like Mormons. The men and boys most recognizably all wore white collared shirts and ties, while the women alternated between wearing Tongan clothes and wearing skirts or dresses that were permitted to have a shorter hem and could fit closer to the body. Mormon modesty is determined by Temple garments that are essentially shorts and short-sleeved shirts. There may be suggestions from the church on ap-

appropriate tightness of clothing, but Temple garments are the primary parameter for modesty in dress, my Mormon friends told me. There was also a notable absence of *ta'ovala* among Mormons members, although high school students wore them one day a week, as was common for all the high schools; and Mormon missionaries wore *ta'ovala* daily as part of their missionary uniform.

My Peace Corps friends were a great resource on figuring out the complicated system of what to wear in different settings. One of them lived in a primarily Mormon village far from Neiafu and went to the LDS Church on Sundays. “The first Sunday I went to church in my village I was decked out in full Tongan church clothes: one of the *pule taha* (matching wrap skirt and tailored blouse that extends over the skirt to mid-thigh) my host family in Tongatapu gave me and a *kiekie*. It’s what I wore to church in Tongatapu with my host family, they were Methodist, Free Church of Tonga.” Mary Anne explained to me one day. “I felt so out of place. No one was wearing *ta'ovala* and only a few older ladies had *pule taha*. Everyone else wore *palangi* clothes. I mean, still skirts and dresses,” she clarified, “but stuff you could wear at home too.”

One Sunday morning I saw some of my friends in shorts and tank tops and I asked them where they were going, thinking (and hoping) that they would tell me they were going to the beach. Instead they said they were going to church. I assumed this was a lie or a joke since they were in no state of dress for any church I had been to. But they actually did go to church—an evangelical charismatic church called City Impact where it was repeatedly emphasized that you can “come as you are”—and when I finally visited City Impact towards the end of my fieldwork, I was shocked at what I saw. People were there

with all their tattoos showing, some were wearing sweatshirts and flip flops, or shorts and tank tops like my friends. I saw some girls there in skin tight jeans. One woman was wearing essentially what I wore to weave. Not only were the clothes, on the whole, tighter or less layered than what people wore to the more traditional churches, they were much more casual.

## Conclusion

In the remainder of this dissertation, I examine the symbolism of wide and narrow across several avenues: bodies, family, and money. I argue that these motifs align with particular sets of values. Wideness, for example, indicates adherence to the values of “the Tongan way”—values of generosity, expansive networks of people to take care of and who care for you, obedience to family, God, and country, and respect for the rank system. By contrast, narrowness correlates with the values associated with “the *palangi* way” which are rooted in individual self-sufficiency and achievement, capitalist approaches towards money, saving, and spending and in some instances, the explicit desire to change those aspects of the “Tongan way” that feel burdensome to people or “hold them back.”

The section on “fat bodies” shows that there is still an aesthetic system that favors big bodies and sees them as attractive, as possibly signifying high status, as an indicator of being well cared for and being a social person, and finally as strong, healthy, and capable of contributing to a family and community (Becker 1995; Gell 1993; Valeri 1985). Not only does this highlight a deep history of this aesthetic system, but it shows how the



body can be a reflection of participation in the family and community.

Likewise, the use of mats for wrapping bodies and objects achieves this two-fold reference as it also highlights long-held traditions, adherence to Tongan values, and requires contextualization within a family or community to be fully understood (Addo 2003). The visual effect of wrapping as widening a person's silhouette is also significant, and as such can work to convey the same things that fatness can: high status and deeply-rooted Tongan traditions (Küchler 2005). Both physical fatness and wrapped bodies reflect the values and aesthetics of "the Tongan way."

The section on "small bodies" highlights international and *palangi* cultural influence through Western medicalized language and approach to big bodies, as well as the international media interest in Pacific Islanders' "problematically" fat bodies. This media interest is particularly poignant at the moment as the body of Tongan Olympian Pita Taufatofua is currently receiving a lot of media attention, not for fatness, but for his athletic body and the presentation of his bare, oiled chest, which happens to be a respectful presentation of one's body for a performance—like dancing, or in Taufatofua's case, carrying the flag for the Olympic Opening Ceremonies. This section continues to highlight the connection to small bodies and *palangi* values as weight loss is approached as a solve-able "problem" through individual effort and discipline.

Finally, the section on tight clothes demonstrates a connection to "the *palangi* way," partially because it *reads* as *palangi* and contributes to a dichotomy of dress whereby wrapped correlates with "the Tongan way" and unwrapped with "the *palangi* way." This is not unlike the dichotomy Tarlo discusses in colonial India between draped

versus tailored clothing, which demonstrated adherence to sets of values and visions for the future of India (1996). Tightly-fitted clothing narrows a silhouette and is also associated with times and places with notable *palangi* influence, like Mormon and Evangelical churches and church events as well as Amanaki's work in a cafe and life visiting Australia.

Most importantly, what this chapter underscores and what is visible throughout the following chapters, is that the push-and-pull between these different systems of values is present. There are countless contradictions, and, bodies are useful to think with as they show the oscillation between different systems of value. It manifests through feasting and dieting, through wanting to lose weight but being unable to avoid family obligations, and through the incredibly varied wardrobes people need to move in different circles appropriately. The focus on dress in this chapter and throughout the following chapters is in response to Keane, who argues that dress does not just index ideas, it invites actions and makes certain ways of being possible (2005), and to Colchester's argument that clothing has always been used in the Pacific to gesture respect, dominance, and submission (2003).

## Chapter 3

### The Feasts: Free Wesleyan Church Conference

The Wesleyan Church Conference disrupted everything in Vava'u. This annual week-long church conference in July moved locations to different islands each year and was marked most visibly by the multiple daily feasts hosted by local women of the church. The women who hosted were married and older—socially established enough to have the resources to provide the food, dishes, and decorations for one table at the feast, each of which would seat 20-40 people.

A month before the conference, my weaving group moved to a different meeting hall because the hall we normally used was needed to house conference-goers from the Niuas—the northernmost island group in Tonga. Since the ferry only goes to their islands once a month, they were in Vava'u nearly a month before the conference began to begin to set up. Two weeks before the conference my weaving group took a break to prepare for the conference, even though only two of our seven group members were actually Wesleyan. Visitors began pouring into the island from the ferries and planes; and this time, instead of white foreign tourists coming to stay at resorts and swim with the whales, the arriving people were Tongans coming in from other islands or from overseas. I saw high school students cleaning the grounds of the Mailefihi High School, and tending the gardens of the school, the church, and the dorms. Seeing this work reminded me that the

main Wesleyan church had been freshly painted a few months ago, and since then its white exterior gleamed so bright in the sun it made all the other buildings in town look like they needed fresh paint too.

During the week of the conference, Mailefihi High School was on break because the conference was located on the school's grounds, so teenagers were everywhere in town. Neiafu, the main town of Vava'u, was small and quiet, and differences—like a high school being on break, or the tourist season ramping up, or the influx of visitors for the conference—were really palpable. Saturdays were normally very busy in town because people came in from the villages to do their shopping and get ready for Sunday, but this week it felt like Saturday every day because so many extra people were around. The little shops that were normally crammed full of merchandise, felt even more packed because they were also full of people. Gradually at first, and then rapidly as the date of the conference drew nearer, the island filled up with new people.

### **Arrivals**

One day I thought I was just going over to Mahina's house to work on her own mats, not as part of the group but just to make progress on her own projects, and her sister Vahine called up and asked if I wanted to go "greet the boat." I said yes, of course, because that seemed like the right answer to any invitation. Mahina told me to go into town and wait by a shop called Melie Meilangi and Vahine would pick me up. I asked her if I needed anything and she said no, so I just took my phone, my umbrella (protection

against dogs, the sun, and occasionally rain), and five dollars<sup>6</sup> to buy some phone credit, just in case I needed it. I left my bag with everything else at Mahina's house and walked the five or ten minute walk into town, bought some phone credit on the way, and then sat on a bench outside the store. A lot of people sat on these benches and I always wanted to, but did not have a reason to sit there. Today though I was specifically instructed to be right there sitting on this bench because Mahina's sister was going to pick me up to go do something I had never done before and was not quite sure what it even was.

Vahine got out of someone's car, called my name and waved to me. She said we had to go to the harbor, so we walked over there. I thought that this is where we might be greeting the boat, but that was not the case. We walked into a big warehouse stacked high with huge boxes made out of plywood, plastic barrels, and an odd assortment of other large containers. Everything seemed aggressively labeled with people's names and villages in huge letters, on multiple sides of the boxes. I saw a few names I knew and many villages I recognized—Makave, 'Utulei, Pangaimotu, Leimatu'a, Kameli, Toula. I read as many as I could, trying to quiz myself on where they were all located, while Vahine talked to someone. There were a few men working there, a couple of young, strong men in neon vests, and one man whom I had recognized from somewhere in town. He was the customs official. After waiting around for a while, Vahine told me that we were riding with a man, in whose direction she nodded, to 'Utulei, her parents' village. When the crate was ready—after the customs was paid and it was loaded onto a pickup truck—

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<sup>6</sup> The currency in Tonga is called *pa'anga*, people use the terms dollars and *pa'anga* interchangeably, so I will as well, and unless otherwise indicated, either word refers to Tongan *pa'anga*. At the time of fieldwork the exchange rate was roughly 1USD=2TOP.

Vahine and I climbed in the back with it and two children. A man and an older lady and a small child were in the front. The drive to 'Utulei was hilly, winding, and gorgeous. I had been to this side of the island a few times and always loved the ride. We passed through villages, the bush, groves of coconut trees, past one of the big vanilla plantations, and past my friend's uncle's watermelon farm. The sea was visible for most of the drive, sometimes on both sides of the road. 'Utulei is a small village right on the sea. Actually, arriving in 'Utulei involved driving down a big, steep hill with the sea right at the bottom of the road; if the car's breaks did not work, for example, it would roll straight into the ocean.

When we got out of the truck, Vahine made a big deal about how she would get an ice cream cone for the man and his wife next time we were in town, and he made a big deal of declining. She gave the littlest child a big kiss and we walked into her parent's house. We said hello to her parents but then quickly left and walked down to the beach where a group of people were blowing up balloons and stringing them together and making decorations with ribbons. The group included mostly women, some teenagers who were either out of school or just ditching for the day, and a few small children. Children were running around and the women were chatting, some teenage boys were swimming out to the little platform and a boat was going out there too with the long string of balloons to connect the dock to the shore. Pretty soon the rest of us got in the boat and went out to the dock as well, the boys were still jumping off it and pushing each other into the water, and threatening to push the girls in too, despite their shrieks of protest. The adults ignored this flirtatious scene. One of the women had a feather boa and red lipstick on her

lips and cheeks, which I had come to learn was always a sign of something fun.

When the ferry was in sight everyone started singing and dancing on the little platform and waving their arms, the feather boas, and ribbons. When the ferry approached closer, the singing and dancing got more exaggerated, rocking the little platform-raft even more; eventually it turned into screaming and waving at the passengers, many of whom were out on the deck watching and waving back at us. We were close enough that I could see people's faces and clothes. There were men who looked like they were not from the village. They looked stylish and cool and their clothes looked expensive with crisp but loose shorts and bright white t-shirts, and new looking hats and sunglasses. The girls looked good, too, in matching *pule taha* that were brightly colored and probably newly made for the occasion. Everyone looked great, especially compared to those of us on the floating platform—the women and girls wearing t-shirts, sarongs, and feather boas, and the teenage boys in wet clothes. We looked like the island versions of country bumpkins.

As soon as the ferry passed us we hopped in little motor boats and followed it into the harbor waving, shouting, and singing. Then when the ferry docked, the Mailefihi High School band was waiting all dressed up ready to play music, which they did to everyone's delight. There's nothing like brass instruments playing pop music to liven up a setting, especially when it was lively to begin with. None of my mundane ferry rides were greeted with this kind of fanfare, although, when one of my trips to Vava'u coincided with the Saineha High School (LDS-affiliated) reunion, they sent a DJ to play music for the ferry, which was carrying a lot of alumni. In addition to the high school band,

there was a huge crowd of people watching or waiting to meet relatives to pick them up, or just watching the people arrive. After the band played a few songs, including a rendition of Justin Bieber's "Baby," a minister took a microphone, said a prayer, and gave a welcoming small speech. Then the passengers started to head to the exits, men began throwing luggage off the boat to people on the ground, the band dispersed, and we took our little boats back to 'Utulei. The diaspora was back.

### **The Diaspora Returned**

One of my University of Virginia professors told me and my classmates this would happen: instead of having to conduct multi-sited projects to research diasporic communities, she suggested that, if we stayed in one place, the diaspora would eventually come to us, because people so often return home. Just a few months into my research, this was already true. It wasn't just people that arrived, either; they brought food, gifts, decorations, and things to sell in their suitcases and in all those shipping crates.

The fair was the best yet. The fair happened on Saturday morning every week on the main streets of Vava'u's capital, Neiafu, and was a time when people had booths of things to sell. People mostly sold used clothing, but also kitchenware, household products, and various goods from overseas that could not be purchased in the "Chinese Stores," which were grocery-convenience stores, so named because they were owned and run by Chinese people. Tongatapu, the main island, had a much bigger fair that was open all week, but up in Vava'u the fair was only on Saturday mornings, and for much of the year it could be pretty sparse. But now there were booths with lots of nice clothes. Some



had packaged food from overseas too, and many also had shampoo, soaps, perfumes, lotions, laundry detergent, toothpaste. It was really wonderful. Talia explained to me why these American things were better than the products in all the local shops: she said the local things all came from China where they have “no regulations” and these American things were higher quality because they had to hold up to American regulations.

Oddly enough, Talia’s comments on toothpaste and shampoo paralleled a discussion people were having about the new fleet of planes given to Tonga by China. “Those planes aren’t safe,” I was warned. “China has no regulations. It’s better to take the ferry.” If a ranking of nations exists in Tonga—which it probably does because I was told by an informant that “everything is ranked,” just as Queen Salote said “rank is everything” (Wood-Ellem 2001:xv)—then the U.S. and Australia are at the top, as the best place to make money and the hardest to acquire visas, making it seem exclusive. Next is New Zealand, which is lower because it is more accessible, but also a good place to earn money. Fiji is likely next because it is a main center of business, education, and politics in the region. Then China, despite the massive amount of aid given to Tonga by the country, there tended to be resentment and racism towards Chinese people who lived in Tonga, most of whom owned shops. For example, during the conference week, I asked Tevita who benefitted from all the additional commerce for the feasts. He gave me a look that I read as irritation and just said “the Chinese.”

There was palpable tension, not just between the Chinese shop owners and Tongans, but between the returned diaspora and the local Tongans. My friend Fiona worked in a cafe I went to for coffee and the internet, and sometimes to write field notes if I could

not wait until I got home. Fiona's English was really good and she always and only spoke to me and every white person in English. Therefore, it was pretty notable when one day she was speaking to me in Tongan. They were easy things, that anyone spending a bit of time in Tonga would have known, so I gathered that it was not meant to be aggressive. She was also saying things loudly, and then pretty soon was rolling her eyes. After a group of people left the cafe she came over and I asked her what was going on. She sighed, rolled her eyes again, and said "these overseas Tongans! They think they're better than everybody else. They act like they are too good for Vava'u."

I asked her what happened and she continued "they only speak to me in English. They just want everybody to know they are not from here."

"Maybe they know Tongan," I suggested.

Fiona raised her eyebrows and looked at me doubtfully before assuring me that "they know Tongan. They at least can say *malo aupito* (thank you). They're just showing off."

I laughed and said "maybe they think you're Samoan. Or maybe *they're* Samoan!"

She rolled her eyes again, but laughed this time, and before she turned to leave, she whispered "I hate them."

One of the tables that I was invited to—through Mahina's mission to get me going to the conference feasts every day—was also one that my friend Talia was going to. I was glad to have someone to talk to instead of sitting by strangers. When I saw her, she im-

mediately asked me if she looked okay. I told her she did but asked why she was concerned. Then she explained that she had not taken a shower and she had been up all night helping her mom's neighbor cook for her table because today was her village's day at the conference and the neighbor was hosting a table. She told me she did not have anything to wear, she was locked out of her house and had to climb in through a window to get a sweater and a *kiekie* to wear over her strapless dress (which would not have been appropriate). When she said all of this, her appearance did make sense and I supposed that she did not look particularly "put together" and her eyes were bloodshot. Still, she was laughing about it all and was sizing up the food on the table she wanted to eat, pointing out the good things to me. She told me that as soon as the prayer was over I should put the chocolate bars from the centerpieces in my purse.

The conference session was dismissed and we saw men in black blazers, *tupenu*, and *ta'ovala* and women in brightly colored *pule taha* walking out of the conference to the feast area. Talia said "Kalo, you better pick out a husband here! These guys live overseas and they probably have actual jobs," she laughed mischievously. We started picking out which men looked the best and finally Talia said "You know, these guys all look like hot shit here because they bought all their fake designer sunglasses and their fake designer watches right before they came to Vava'u so they'd look extra important, but back in New Zealand, they are probably nothing." She laughed and continued "You should just marry a *palangi* from America so you don't have to bother with any of this Tongan bullshit."

### **“Tongan Bullshit”**

Talia was one of the more scathing critics of Tongan culture and traditions and this was not the first time she emphatically warned me away from Tongan men. The first time was so that I would not have to deal with Tongan funerals. The second time was because “they are all cheaters and liars,” except for a few good ones, like her husband. And this latest time I assumed she was referencing how she was up all night cooking for her mom’s friend’s feast table, which, just moments before she was laughing about. This reaction struck me as very common amongst my friends in Tonga. They would joke about things that bothered them, or they would laugh and talk about some obligation like it was simultaneously fun and a *fakahela* (exhausting, but used almost like “a pain in the ass”). Or they would switch from talking about something fondly to then being annoyed about the burden of it all.

The Wesleyan Conference was a week-long church meeting marked most meaningfully (from my point of view) and most visibly by days of feasts. It was chaotic, loud, busy, and colorful. There was too much food and too much of everything; after months of living with a family under somewhat tight circumstances, the expense of this event felt excessive, wrong, irrational, and poorly planned. I was continuously shocked by everything I was seeing. “Tongans are too poor for all of this!” I thought. “How could people afford this kind of thing?” In my shock, I blurted out these observations and questions without thinking much about manners, but people did not seem too phased by my bluntness; rather, they took it as an opening to explain and complain.

I asked one of my friends how much all of this cost and why people would spend

all this money. She answered that the Wesleyans don't count the money they spend. On one occasion when I was sitting at a feast all dressed up waiting for the speeches to finish so we could dig in to the mountains of special foods in front of us, my feast table neighbor turned to me and gestured to the food "this is why Tongans are poor," he said with a laugh. Once the same sentiment was said with almost a tone of remorse; another time it was said in a half-joke with a shrug, suggesting things might never change. The conference-goers wore name tags on which their home locations were printed, and I noted that the comments were from both local and overseas Tongans. My friends and informants seemed capable of being simultaneously proud of extravagant Tongan traditions and annoyed by them. Everything was joked about. Mahina's husband Soane joked the most about how "dumb" Tongans are. He laughed and laughed and told me "you better eat now because after the conference it'll be crackers and tea for every meal" he laughed more "because no one has any money left for food. *This* is the Tongan way... to not think about things."

Soane was joking, of course, because people were very aware of what was happening behind-the-scenes of the conference. Tevita was irritated that Tongans were, by and large, not the ones benefitting from the extra commerce brought by the conference. 'Ofa saw that it was easy for people to keep spending even when they knew they would hurt for it in the near future. People remarked to me repeatedly that Tongan traditions "make no sense." Finally, there was the common observation that participation in traditional celebrations keeps Tongans poor.

## Cooking

Mahina told me to come to her house at 6 am and to bring a nice outfit. I packed my favorite church outfit—a maroon satin *pule taha*—and my sparkly sandals in my shoulder bag, and got dressed in leggings, a t-shirt, a sarong, and flip flops at 5:20 am. My hair never looked good in Tonga, so I just put it up in my usual bun that looked untidy to me and everyone else. The weather felt kind of nice at this hour, but it took quite an effort to get myself up so early. Everyone else in the house was sleeping. I drank a quick cup of coffee in my room and then left with my umbrella and my shoulder bag to walk the dusty, slightly hilly walk to Mahina's. I only vaguely knew what we'd be doing that day because my Tongan was not fluent and Mahina's English was not great either, but we were still great friends. I was pretty sure we were going to cook something for the conference and then we were going to attend a conference feast with someone.

I walked down Mahina's street and heard someone call out in a very high-pitched sing-songy voice, "Kaaaalo!" I turned and saw Mahina ducking out of view and laughing exaggeratedly from her neighbor's door. Then I started laughing, because Mahina's laugh always made me laugh, and she waved me to come into this house instead. In the front yard, I saw a group of young men sitting around smoking cigarettes and roasting a whole bunch of small pigs on a contraption—a many-pronged spit that could be rotated over a fire—that looked like it was custom built for that specific purpose. On my way to the door I tried to count the pigs quickly while looking like I was not looking at the men or the pigs for too long. I saw at least ten.

Inside was a big room that took up the whole front side of the house. It was paint-

ed blue and on the left there was a twin bed that a woman and some children were sitting on like a couch. To the right was a propane stove where a young, familiar-looking woman was making Spanish tortilla. In the middle of the room was a big table covered in a plastic tablecloth and piled high with all kinds of food: a huge bowl of pasta salad, a bowl of crab salad, sausages from New Zealand (I was told), hard-boiled eggs, cucumbers and tomatoes, cans of pineapple, cans of fish, as well as cabbage, carrots, lobsters, crabs, and meatballs. There were also cutting boards, little plastic containers of prepared food and stacks of empty ones waiting to be filled.

Mahina was sitting at the table mixing up ingredients for fish pies. She told me to sit down and asked if I wanted some tea; I accepted because I always want tea. There was an adjacent room in the back of the house that looked like the kitchen, or another kitchen, that had a refrigerator and a sink and another stovetop. A woman came out of that room and brought me a cup of tea and a huge piece of cake. She looked really happy to see me, or just happy in general, and kissed me on the cheek. Mahina told me that was 'Ema and she was hosting the table.

It was hard to contain my shock upon seeing all of this food. Not only was the prep table piled high, but there were boxes and bins shipped from abroad with 'Ema's name, village, and Vava'u Tonga written all over them in permanent marker like the ones I had seen with Vahine at the harbor. I peered into a few of them and one had stacks of glass plates, glasses, pink paper napkins, and white lace tablecloths. Another box had canned food from abroad: cherry pie filling and raspberry sauce—things I had certainly never seen locally available—and packages of cookies, potato chips, and chocolate bars.

Occasionally one of the men from the group roasting pigs and manning the pit oven (‘*umu*) would come into the house to get something, to talk to 'Ema, or to bring in a palm-leaf basket of cooked ‘*ufi*, a huge root crop that tasted like mashed potatoes to me. ‘*Ufi* was my favorite and someone had explained to me on a previous trip that it was one of the top root crops (because everything is ranked!), what you would give a king.

I was particularly intrigued by the girl, whose name was Lesieli, making tortilla. Not only was I surprised to see a Tongan girl making this, but my roommate in Virginia used to make tortilla all the time, so it reminded me of him to see it. Plus, he usually just made one, and she was making one after another after another and someone else was putting them into little containers with slices of tomatoes. I asked her if she was making tortilla and she smiled and said “yeah!” Then I asked where she learned to make it, half expecting her to tell me Spain. She asked me if I knew about the restaurant called Neptune’s down by the water. I told her I did. She said “I work there. The owner is from Europe and he’s married to my cousin. He showed me how to do it.” Lesieli told me that 'Ema is her aunt and that her cousins live in New Zealand and sent a lot of the food over.

“This seems so expensive” I said. Lesieli raised her eyebrows and smiled in quiet affirmation that it was indeed very expensive. Money was so confusing to me. There never seemed to be enough, and yet suddenly there was plenty to pay for something like this. Granted, people knew it was coming far in advance. The pigs roasting outside would have cost a thousand dollars, unless they raised them themselves, and that was just a fraction of the food.

After I finished my tea, Mahina put me to work, but not real work, just work



enough so I had something to do. She was arranging sausages and hard-boiled eggs in little boxes and made me put a stripe of ketchup on top and add the lids. Then I added the lids to little bowls of octopus that she was portioning out. Mahina told me they had been cooking all night. I asked her until when and she looked at me not understanding. I re-phrased it and she laughed and said “Kalo, open your eyes! We did not stop.” Then I laughed at my own stupid question and asked “so none of you slept?” She said “no, we’ll sleep later.” Lesieli looked over at us from the stove and laughed also. Then I realized that everyone did look pretty tired and maybe like the table Talia was helping with, maybe everyone expected to be cooking all night.

It was around 11:00 am when things started really picking up speed and huge coolers and big plastic bins were getting packed. A truck pulled up and into the front yard and all the men who were roasting the pigs started putting the packed bins and coolers into the back. The pigs were covered in foil and put into coolers to keep them hot.

I did not notice when 'Ema slipped away to get ready, but she came out dressed very nicely in a bright pink *pule taha* and a colorful *kiekie*, with a big necklace, bright lipstick, and a big flower in her hair. Mahina told me it was time to go over to her house and change. No one else seemed to be changing. It was getting hot, but luckily we would not be expected to walk anywhere all dressed up so it did not matter much that formal clothes were often made out of uncomfortable polyester satins and covered most of your body. Mahina had a nice bright yellow *pule taha* with white flowers, it looked like a Hawaiian-Polynesian print to me. She had a similar *kiekie* to the one 'Ema wore, which was made out of colorful ribbons or colored raffia. I liked it and sometimes I had seen

people wear this kind of *kiekie* to church. Mine was a little boring in comparison. Mahina also had her hair pulled tight into a neatly-worn high bun, big earrings, and red lipstick—this was a classic Mahina look. I wore my maroon satin *pule taha* that a friend had given me on a previous trip. It was pretty, but it was getting tight. I tried to redo my bun to make it look a little nicer, but it was frizzy and not sleek like Mahina's.

### **Feasting**

Mahina and I piled into the truck with a few other people who had been cooking, all the packaged-up food, and eight of the ten roasted, foil-wrapped pigs. When we drove into the conference area some people were already there for 'Ema's table with the decorations, centerpieces, and boxes of real dishes and napkins, silverware, glass glasses, bottles of juices, and a box full of candy *kahoa*—leis made out of cellophane with wrapped candy inside. There were rows and rows of tables under the tents. 'Ema was hosting one “table,” which was actually one row of tables that sat 40-60 people—it seemed like double the size of the other one I had been to. The other table hosts and their teams of family-friend-neighbor helpers were also busy setting up.

Most people were dressed in work clothes, but if any of the girls had pants on instead of a skirt, then they had a sarong tied over the top of them. I always did that when I was weaving—it is kind of a conservative look because I was trying to err on the safe side. Also seeing everyone covering their hips and bottoms reminded me of the teenage girls who were weeding the whole Mailefihi High School yard on Saturday. My teacher friend asked them why they were not with their friends in town. They told us that they got

caught the previous weekend wearing pants and this was their punishment. The Methodists in Tonga were the most conservative regarding dress, and they were the most traditional in many other ways too. Even the fact that the Church Conference was most marked by feasts was itself traditional.

The white table cloths were just the blank canvas as people layered lace table cloths on top, then they set the table with plates, glasses, silverware, napkins. Next came the centerpieces: huge 1-kilo cans of corned beef were the base that propped up colorful plastic baskets with bows on the handles and filled with bags of chips, chocolate bars, shelf-stable boxes of milk, cookies, apples, oranges, and grapes. Then they set out the bottles of juice and individual water bottles at each place. Then came the pigs wrapped in foil that were lined up down the center of the tables. After that they added the little containers of foods: potato salad, octopus, fish pie, sausages, pasta salad, creamy seafood pasta, tortilla, quiche, fried chicken, fried fish, cole slaw, crab salad, lamb curry, raw fish salad, mussels, plates of the nicest root vegetables ( *ʻuʻfi* and taro), puddings, cakes, and trifles. There was never enough room for all of this food and inevitably it had to be piled up on top of each other, so it looked like a precarious mountain of plastic containers of feast foods punctuated by gift baskets (see Photos 3.1 and 3.2).

All the tables looked like this, more or less. One table had what looked like champagne bottles at every place setting, but upon closer examination they were actually sparkling apple juice. Some tables had color themes, or focused on decorating above the table as well, hanging decorations from the tent ceiling. As people put the finishing touches on the tables, they started clearing away the extra food and the bins and boxes

used to transport everything. Some of the helpers in their work clothes left in the rumbling cars they came in, while others just moved to the back and the sides.

Mahina was dressed up so she stayed with me this time (other times she left to the sides) and pretty soon the conference session ended and the people filed out and looked for an inviting table. People attending the conference were free to choose any table they wanted; I was invited to specific ones, as was Talia and some other people because we knew the hostesses and were not going to the church meetings. The high school band played; it was noisy and chaotic and buzzed with a new kind of activity. Each feast meal was hosted by a village, and the tables were divided up and hosted by women from that village. Each table's host stood decked out and decorated at the head of her table, sometimes dancing to the music and generally contributing to the liveliness. Everything, from the tables to the people themselves and the relationships represented was big, layered, decorated, and wrapped.

After everyone had taken their seats, the music continued playing and each host left the table to pick up mats from the side of the feast grounds. It was very lively and they were dancing with their mats up to the head table where the top ministers—and typically a member of the royal family—were sitting. While this was happening, someone came around and put the candy *kahoa* around our necks. The hosts brought the mats to the front, but I could not see where or to whom exactly they were presented. Some men also carried in a huge pig. I asked Mahina who the gifts were for. She told me they were just gifts “to the conference.”

A prayer was said and as soon as the minister said “Amen” people were free to

grab things from the centerpieces as well as start eating whatever they wanted. Before every feast I attended, Mahina told me to “get the corned beef.” Huge cans that cost between \$25 and \$50 were the common bottom layer of centerpieces. I was either too shy to take it or someone beat me to the corned beef cans every time.

Eating was so fun. The real plates set out for everyone were almost just there as a symbol because most food was individually packaged and you could eat right out of the container. Plus there was so much you could barely even see the plates. I tried to sample everything, even though I had already eaten a huge piece cake earlier in the morning. Mahina kept putting things in front me to try if they were slightly out of reach or if I had not tasted it yet. I do not really like sausage, but I tasted it because everyone talked about New Zealand sausage. I had to try to tortilla and everything I saw at 'Ema's house. Mahina was also eating a little of this and a little of that. She grabbed a lobster, dug out some meat, and handed it to me before eating some herself. The food was really delicious. It felt like there were no rules: certainly, there neither obligations to finish anything, nor limits on how many containers one could sample. Even with everyone eating as much as they wanted, there were still piles of food left over, with many containers not touched at all. Most of the pigs had not even been unwrapped. After a while some of the people helping came around with bowls of ice cream and cake for everyone. I was stuffed but I still ate some dessert.

After the conference-goers and guests finished and filed away, the second wave of people sat down to eat. Everyone from the sides who had been working to cook and set up came to the tables. Mahina and I sat there and talked to the people while they ate. Af-

ter things died down even more people started to pack up bags with leftovers to take home to their families. Mahina found a huge plastic bag for me and she started putting little containers in it. She filled it and found another bag and told me “Tevita and 'Ofa will be happy! They don’t have to cook tonight!” She laughed because she was giving me too much food, it looked crazy. We called her husband for a ride and they dropped me off. The whole family was home and everyone dug into the food and picked out what they wanted to eat. Afterwards 'Ofa put the rest in the fridge where I saw that someone else had already dropped off feast leftovers. Kolina saw my look of surprise and said “the conference is nice for everyone because you don’t have to cook all week, people just bring food.”

## **Conclusion**

There are two main themes in this chapter I would like to highlight that relate to the larger argument of this dissertation: one is that the Conference embodies the motif of wideness down to nearly every detail, and the second is that various scenarios related to the Conference are rife with tension, which highlights the relevance of the discussion between “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way.” This event also demonstrates some of the processes of “doing” through which kinship is made—that is, how certain, possibly distant, relatives are brought closer in, how bonds between diaspora and island-based Tongans are reinforced, and how friendships shift closer to be “like family” (Carsten 1995, 2000; McKinnon 2016). These processes include cooking, giving gifts of purchased, grown, or raised food, traveling and bringing gifts from abroad, and sharing food.

This also highlights some of the ways in which kin relations are materialized: through gifts of food and foreign-purchased goods like feast decorations, which are then put on display to visually demonstrate one's family connections and exert status based on these connections (Bamford 2009; Besnier 2009; Empson 2007).

When considering theme of wideness, this event shows how expansive networks are as the Conference disrupted the whole island, regardless of one's church affiliation. It was also a time when some of the family privileges (explored in greater depth in Chapter 6) are seen, as every table's host was also someone's aunt with the ability to call upon relatives "below her" for material help (Kaeppeler 1971; Rogers 1977). Not only were hosts activating their informal networks of friends and neighbors, but they were also calling upon their formal network of relatives, particularly those whom they had rights over—their brothers and their brothers' children (Ibid).

It is additionally emblematic of the motif of wideness as people are physically making their bodies larger through sitting, eating, and gaining weight (Kulick and Meneley 2005). This widening is not hidden or shameful either, but shows on people's bodies and becomes an outward sign of someone having experienced Tongan generosity that comes from not a single person, but a whole community (Becker 1995). People's bodies are also made to look larger through wrapping in *ta'ovala* and *kiekie* at the Conference meetings and feasts (Küchler 2005). In addition to people's bodies demonstrating wideness, the general abundance of feast foods on the tables—as well as tables covered in cloths and foods wrapped in cellophane—also support the theme of wideness and conjure traditional grandness (Shore 1989).

The theme of tension appears in different instances throughout the chapter from irritation between the local Tongans and the returned diaspora, to hostility towards the seemingly profiting Chinese business owners, to frustration with Tongan traditions and obligations (Lee 2006; 2009). It shows an important and common set of feelings about Tongan traditions—that they are something in which to take pride, but also possibly doing harm, “holding Tongans back,” or are just irritating (Ibid). This particular struggle is seen both in people’s comments as well as the expense of the food and hard work of staying up through the night in preparation, in addition to work that was done long before the Conference itself. The tension is useful to understand as it elucidates part of the divide and relevance of people who want to live life “the Tongan way” or “the *palangi* way.”



## **Chapter 4**

### **Church and Money**

The extravagant feasts that we just witnessed in the last chapter inevitably entail concerns about money—where and who it comes from, how it is spent, who benefits from the spending, and who is asking for the money (directly or indirectly). This chapter looks at these issues, in particular the connection between what churches are deliberately asking for from their congregants, the types of events they encourage and how that relates to their ideologies towards money, and which approaches to financial management the churches explicitly or implicitly promote.

#### **Some Interviews about Money**

I walked up the long driveway of Saineha, the LDS high school in Vava'u, and took copious mental field notes about how it looked—“tidy, manicured, lush, rich, has that Mormon look”—thinking to myself how significant it all was (see Photos 4.1 and 4.2). I was heading there to meet with a teacher whose name I was given by a friend when I mentioned that I was looking for people to interview who had converted to the LDS Church. I already knew plenty of people locally who were raised within the LDS Church, but I had questions for the converts.

Before I knew this was a high school, I thought it was a resort—though an oddly

located one, so far from the sea. Someone back home in the United States saw a photo and said it looked like a golf course with the expansive lawn, large healthy palm trees, and not a weed or piece of litter in sight. The buildings were set far back from the road and all uniformly made, cleanly painted, and even the pavement was in excellent condition. The road was concrete, rather than the dusty coral gravel that covered most roads. The high school had a manned entry booth at the front of the driveway, which is also where the heavy “English Only” signage began.

I waited in the front office while the secretaries told ‘Una I was there for him. Two young women were working in the front office and they chatted with me, and to each other, in perfect English while I waited. One of them was heading to Brigham Young University in Hawaii the following year and the other had just graduated from the main BYU campus in Utah and was preparing to serve a mission. She said she hoped to get placed in the US, but knew that wherever she was placed would be right. I asked the one who was heading to college if she planned on coming back to Tonga to work after she graduated, and she said with a smile: “of course! I have to help build up the Kingdom.” They both wanted to know if I was Mormon, and I said no, which I always hated admitting to my Mormon informants because I usually sensed a slight shift in the connection with me once they found out.

‘Una walked me to his office; he was kind and friendly and asked to see my list of questions. At that point I was grateful that Tevita insisted that I come up with a list and had helped me translate it. His initial suggestion irritated me because I thought a good interview should proceed more like a conversation, but ‘Una expected it and it put him at

ease to know what was coming.

‘Una had converted from the Wesleyan church a few years before. His wife and children converted with him and he assured me that they all made their own decisions to convert and they prayed about it individually and as a family. He said that initially his interest in conversion was practical: he was a teacher looking for a job and he was told he could get one at Saineha, but that they only hire Mormon teachers. Eventually, after investigating the church and praying about it, he realized that they had good ideas and that the LDS Church was the true church. He told me that he knew this both through prayer and through seeing the success of the church, because such prosperity would not grow from a false seed.

I asked him if he noticed any differences in his life after becoming Mormon. He said that his family relationships were better, his children obeyed him and he no longer fought with his wife.

“It helps the family life when you stop drinking and smoking and going to the kava clubs at night,” he told me. “It is better because you are home with your family more.” I took notes, but let him keep talking. “I also have more money,” ‘Una added.

“Really?” I was surprised to hear that. “Why?” I asked.

“I’m not wasting it on things like the beer and cigarettes and kava. All of that is very expensive.” I nodded and wondered how much kava cost. “Plus,” he continued, “the church only asks for ten percent.”

“Is that less than the other churches?” I asked. It is well known that the LDS Church essentially requires a true tithe of ten percent of one’s income from its members,

but it was the word “only” that stood out to me.

‘Una threw his head back and let out a hearty laugh. “Yes!” He continued, “the other churches ask for everything, they *take* everything, and it’s not right. Everyone is wasting their money and throwing it away, it all goes to the ministers and to feasting.” ‘Una shook his head, “It’s not right.”

After the interview, he confessed to me that he was worried at first about what I wanted to know, because people talk badly about Mormons. He said he was glad to meet me and now he knew that I was a good person. He told me to come back if I needed any more help. I appreciated the vote of confidence and his warmth, and left feeling both curious and intrigued.

I went back to Tevita’s house after the interview for tea and talked with him and his wife. They asked me about everything he said, which made me panic and think about my IRB and how I did not anticipate this potential breach of confidentiality. I decided to share the detail about how the LDS Church asks for ten percent of people’s income and the other churches ask for a lot more than that. It seemed like common knowledge to everyone else and I wanted to know more about it.

Tevita and 'Ofa agreed somewhat. They said yes that ten percent is very small, but clarified that it is the Methodist churches that ask for too much money. “The Catholic church does not ask for much” 'Ofa said, “and you know exactly what it is for. For example, they might want to repaint the church one year, so they do a fundraiser looking to raise maybe 2,000 dollars and each family just gives what they can, a few hundred dollars maybe.” (See Photos 4.3 and 4.4.)

Tevita added that, for the Methodists, all that money goes to the ministers. “Look at the big houses the Methodist ministers live in and then see how simply the Catholic priest lives. He has a simple house and only has a small amount of spending money each month.” Tevita then assured me, with a laugh, that being Catholic is best because you do not have to quit smoking and drinking and going to the kava club. He mused that it is probably very boring to be Mormon. He added that their theology is also very wrong, that Mormons are all *fiepalangi* (they want to be like white people), they show off and they think they are better than everyone else.

I had befriended an Australian volunteer teacher during this trip and was talking to her about the church collections because she worked for the Wesleyan elementary school and seemed very connected to the Wesleyans. She was very opinionated on the topic of church collections “oh, it’s awful,” she told me emphatically.

“It’s called *misinale* and they do it maybe once or a few times a year, I’m not sure. But families know when it’s coming because then people call their relatives abroad and ask for money, or they take out loans to be able to give enough to the church. I’ve even heard of people selling their cars just so they can give money!” Jenna continued, “It’s terrible. They keep a book and read the family names out loud on this *misinale* Sunday and how much money each family donates. That should be private, but instead they announce it in front of everyone.”

We were drinking tea in her very small, but nice house that was on the grounds of the Mailefihi High School (Wesleyan-affiliated) girls’ dormitory. Students from the outer islands boarded here during the week. I listened to her and wondered how much of what

she was saying was real. “That bit about selling a car to donate sounded like a rumor,” I thought. “Although, ‘Una did tell me that they ask for and take everything.”

“It’s just awful” Jenna continued, “and people do not have that kind of money, it’s clearly a big burden. I’ve heard of people asking for advances on their pay from employers; and Matt,” a local cafe owner Jenna had befriended, “told me he flat out refuses to advance people money for *misinale* because he thinks it’s ridiculous.”

A lot of people, it turned out, thought this system was a little problematic. I had talked to Tongan informants who did not belong to Methodist churches who were very opinionated on the matter. Jenna’s outrage and her reporting of the opinions of some other local *palangis* clarified what I could already guess they thought: that it was yet another aspect of Tongan culture that was somehow “backwards.”

I went back to Tevita and asked him if he had any Methodist friends who would talk to me about their church and *misinale*. It took him a while to get back to me with someone, but then he told me that he had a teacher friend who worked at Vava’u High School (government-affiliated) who would do an interview, and she happened to be the daughter of a Methodist minister.

I called the number Tevita gave me and Seini told me to meet her at home after school one day. She, her husband, and their children lived with her parents, which was fairly common, though not prescribed. Since her father was the head minister of the church, they lived at the parsonage house. I had seen this house before and always wondered about it because it was so large and nice looking. This house was clearly a parsonage because it was right next door to the church and was painted the same shade of

salmon-pink, but I had mistakenly assumed that the other Methodist parsonage in town was the governor's mansion (see Photos 4.5 and 4.6).

The inside of the house did not disappoint and made the other Tongan homes I had been in seem quite shabby by comparison. We met in the living room, which had several over-stuffed and ornately upholstered couches, tiled floor, and a tall, 2-story ceiling. The second floor of the house had a balcony that overlooked the large living room. A similarly grandly furnished dining room adjoined the living room, and although everything was very nice and clean, the clutter of life with many people and children was apparent. Perhaps the traditional European furnishings were harkening to the Victorian missionary era that became the hallmark of what is considered traditional Tongan.

Seini and I sat on the couches and I felt very awkward. I had already encountered so many hostile opinions concerning how all of the Methodist churches worked and I had formed my own criticisms as well. I was equally marveling at her family's house and thinking how excessive it was. I also came with my own loaded Protestant Christian opinions on what a parsonage should be and how clergy ought to live. In fact, my great-grandmother was a Methodist minister in Kansas and she did not live in a mansion or amass a fortune from her career in the church. Nevertheless, I remembered that Seini agreed to talk to me and I should minimize my presumptions.

I asked her if she knew how much money the church brought in each year, what they used it for, and if she thought it was a strain on the members of the congregation. Seini said she was unsure of the exact numbers. She told me they needed it for the schools and pointed out to me that both the Mormon and Catholic churches (which I did

not bring up) were much bigger churches internationally and their schools were at least partially funded by the larger churches they were connected to. “The Catholics get money from Rome,” she told me, although I wondered if that was true. “The Mormons get it from America. We are independent, that’s what we wanted, and we just have Tonga. The government does not give any of the church schools funding, so every church has to come up with the money to run the schools by themselves and it is very expensive.”

Seini then assured me that people do not participate in *misinale* if they do not want to and that no one is forced to donate. “Tongans go overseas so that they can help their families here because you can earn so much more money in America and Australia. Here, you know, the jobs do not pay very much, even the good ones. So people go abroad and they know they will send money back to their families, they expect it, that’s why they go. Being generous is the Tongan way.”

The history of the three main churches in Tonga is vital to understand the current practices, attitudes, and promoted ideas about money from the different denominations. This history also helps elucidate why the Methodist Churches are so closely tied to “the Tongan way” and why they are so closely aligned with Tongan values rooted in expansive networks of kin, generous outward movement of gifts and cash, and wrapping in *ta’o-vala*. The Catholic Church in Tonga is also associated with “the Tongan way” and is currently seen alongside the Methodist churches as part of the traditional establishment, but as the history shows this was not always the case. On the other end, the LDS Church is associated with “the *palangi* way,” and is better understood through an examination of their history in Tonga and their particular approaches to money and family.



## The History of the Three Main Churches

### *Methodists*

Shirley Baker, the English missionary-turned-prime minister—who had the ear of the first Tongan king, George Tupou I, before falling out of favor with him—was responsible for beginning the practice of *misinale*. There is an important backstory as to why *misinale* was developed. There are two historical political documents that are useful to this dissertation: the 1862 Emancipation Edict and the 1875 Constitution—both of which Baker helped draft. The 1862 Emancipation Edict was designed to secure the power of the new king locally, who had come from a lesser line of chiefs and who therefore had a somewhat precarious position (Campbell 1992; Rutherford 1996). The 1875 Constitution, however, was more internationally focused and was designed to help Tonga avoid outright colonization. Since the Emancipation Edict was intended to secure the powers of King George Tupou I, the main strategy for doing so was diminishing the powers of the chiefs. This was achieved through emancipating commoners from *fatongia*, or the traditional material obligations commoners had to chiefs. As Baker’s biographer Noel Rutherford explained: “prior to 1862 the king had relied on *fatongia* to provision his canoes for voyages, to provide the wherewithal for state feasts, and to carry out such public works as were undertaken ... to provide an income to defray the cost of these services an annual tax of three dollars was levied on all males sixteen years and over” (1996:32).

Meanwhile, a personal rivalry was happening in Tonga amongst the missionaries in the 1860s. The other missionaries were concerned with Baker’s influence over the king and they were irritated about the Emancipation Edict because they thought the resulting

taxes were too high for Tongans to afford and that there would be nothing left for people to give to the church. The missionaries thought this shift marked an end to their Tongan missions, and in retaliation for Baker's involvement they moved his mission post to Ha'apai, another island group far from the capital and the king. Competitive and ambitious, Baker decided to prove these fears wrong and save face for himself. He began collecting money for the mission by tasking prominent village members with collecting for the church. This assignment quickly turned competitive as "plate-holders" wanted their plate of contributions to be the biggest. They began to pressure family and friends to give generously. Then, much like *misinale* of today, the presentation of plates was public, associated with the man in charge of each plate, and publicly recorded in an account book. Indeed, so much money was raised for the church that in 1869 they collected £5,450 which was £3,000 in excess of local expenses (Rutherford 1996:42). Rutherford notes that competitive giving to churches was likely happening before Baker, but he is the one who encouraged free rein of competition and established the precedent for an annual *misinale* collection.

Baker is not only implicated in the beginning of formally regulated taxation in Tonga and *misinale* collections for Methodist church, but also in the adoption of currency itself. The Godeffroy firm, a German trading company with a significant presence across the Pacific Islands in the nineteenth century, first imported Chilean and Peruvian silver coins in 1867 and used these to purchase both copra (dried coconut) and coconut oil, the main Tongan exports of the time. Not surprisingly, the Godeffroys were friends with Baker and, with his influence in the government, the Chilean silver dollar was declared

the legal currency in 1880. The firm was the only importer of Chilean coins and they made a twenty percent profit on every interaction (Rutherford 1996:129). Before these coins were prevalent in Tonga, most donations to the church were made in copra and coconut oil, which were then sold by the church to trading companies like the Godeffroy firm. Rutherford argues that everyone preferred cash donations; it was easier for the church to manage and it was more satisfying for congregants to donate a plateful of coins than to have an amount of pledged oil read out loud.

The financial success of the Tongan mission was leveraged by Baker to gain its independence as a stand-alone church in charge of its own finances and staffed by local Tongan ministers. Rutherford suggests that Baker's motivation in doing this was, like most of his actions, self-serving (1996). His rivalries with the fellow European missionaries would likely fall away as they were replaced by Tongan ministers. Baker could either have control himself or exert heavy influence over others in charge of the church finances, and finally, he would likely gain even more favor with Tongans by championing their church independence and training as clergy.

The establishment of the practice of *misinale* is notable in that it arose out of this vital era of transition in Tonga when many new systems were established, old ones were reformed, and massive European-Christian influence suffused the culture to create new cultural practices. Various schisms and attempts at reunification have resulted in the three main Methodist denominations in Tonga. The first is the Free Church of Tonga which was established in 1885 by King Tupou I and Baker. The second is the Free Wesleyan Church established in 1924 by Queen Salote; it is the largest of the three and closely tied to the

royals. The third is the Church of Tonga, also known as the Church of the Lords, established in 1928 and it is the smallest Methodist branch (Wood-Ellem 2001).

The Royal Family is so closely connected to Methodism partially by chance. Tau-fa'ahau, or King George Tupou I was the founder of the Tupou Dynasty—which still reigns in Tonga—and came from the third highest line of chiefs, the Tu'i Kanokupolu. He saw an opportunity to use Christianity to help him gain power and unite the islands as a nation under him as a European-styled king (Siikala 1982); Methodist missionaries were “in the right place at the right time,” so to speak. In addition to the material benefits of the new king's *palangi* connections via the missionaries, utilizing the symbolism of foreignness (Christianity and his new name, George) to gain power was in line with old Polynesian patterns of disruptions in authority and was similar to his chiefly-turned-royal contemporaries, particularly in Tahiti (Krizancic 2009; Sahlins 1985; Siikala 1982). Through key relationships, particularly with Shirley Baker who was instrumental in gaining the independence of the church in Tonga, the Methodist church became the church that best fit the royals through church hierarchies that complement the royal-noble system but *do not* compete with it, and through the promotion of an array of Tongan traditions from wrapping in *ta'ovala* to giving gifts, feasting, and participation in large funerals.

### ***Catholics***

The history of Catholicism in Tonga is defined by what it is not: royal. King Tupou I was Methodist, closely aligned with Shirley Baker, and was himself from the lowest line of the highest three chiefly lineages. As a result of his lineage status, many

people saw him as a usurper. Catholic missionaries came to Tonga in 1842 on invitation of Tupou I's enemies, those of the Tu'i Tonga line (the highest chiefly line) and his supporters (Campbell 1992; Siikala 1982). Of course, with that association there was probably a hope that the Catholic Church *would* be the church of the royals, but as the Tupou dynasty retained its strength, Catholics shifted their perspective to emphasize—and take pride in—their differences with both the Methodists and their associated royals. Tevita pointed out a noble to me one Sunday during Mass. “See,” he said “you wouldn’t know he’s noble because he’s sitting in the back of the church just like anyone else. The Wesleyans have special chairs at the front for nobles and royals, but here, even if the Queen comes to Mass, she just sits with the rest of us.”

His statement turned out to be not entirely true, since I saw the Queen Mother attending a Catholic funeral and she did have a special chair at the front of the church that sat on top of a small stack of Tongan textiles. In the Methodist Churches, those chairs for royalty and nobility are permanent fixtures.

The international structure and oversight of the Catholic Church theoretically keeps the church from becoming an entirely Tongan entity, like the Methodists. Although in huge portions of the world Catholicism is much more known for syncretism than Protestantism. The first Methodist missionaries arrived in Tonga in 1797, but the first baptism was not until 1826, so by the time the Catholics arrived in 1842 there were still plenty of Tongans who had not dedicated themselves to Christianity (Campbell 1992). Essentially Catholics and Methodists were working in tandem.

The divide between the two churches, however, was acutely felt as there were

chiefly and royal allegiances associated with each church, in addition to looming international colonizing forces behind each one. The Methodists were originally sent by the London Missionary Society and thus were oriented to the British Empire. The Catholic missions in the Pacific were supported by France, and in turn helped by the French Navy (Campbell 1992). Theologically and doctrinally there are, of course, many differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, which additionally spurred the divide. Due to their relatively long history in Tonga, and the structures that permitted each church to take on very Tongan elements, Methodists and Catholics are now effectively grouped together as “traditional” churches, in opposition to Mormons, and likely Evangelicals or other newer denominations in Tonga.

As one informant put it: “I know a lot of people who change churches. If you marry someone from a different church usually it’s the girl who converts. Families don’t mind so much because they know this happens and it’s okay to be Catholic or Wesleyan or Free Church of Tonga. It doesn’t really matter. But no one wants you to date a Mormon; if you date a Mormon the family stops it right away because they don’t want you to get married to them and convert. That church is very strong. Even if the girl is Mormon she usually makes the man come to her church.”

### ***Mormons***

As the Catholics are continually defined by their distance from the Tongan royalty, the Mormons in Tonga are defined by a perception of persecution, despite being (by their own metrics) the majority religion (“Tonga—LDS Statistics” 2018). Granted, the

narrative of Mormonism, possibly everywhere, is closely tied to persecution as it is an essential feature of their origin story and a principle reason why the church is administratively and spiritually headquartered in Utah (Leone 1979).

Mormon missionaries first came to Tonga in 1891, but did not achieve success in terms of converts immediately. In some ways, their conversion efforts were thwarted by rumors spread by the other foreigners in Tonga, particularly that the missionaries were promoting polygamy (Wood-Ellem 2001). The doctrine on “plural marriage” or polygamy was abandoned by the church in 1890 and never taught in Tonga (Britsch 1985); nevertheless, the reputation followed them. There were also arguments that Mormons were not Christian, that they encouraged rudeness, and that they were possibly spreading democratic ideas. From 1922-1924 Mormons were denied entry to Tonga based on the aforementioned concerns (Wood-Ellem 2001).

The church grew steadily, but in small numbers until the 1940s when Mormon scripture was translated and published in Tongan. The Mormons experienced another growth spurt during the 1950s and 1960s after Liahona High School (the LDS high school on Tongatapu) was opened with American-style education and an express goal to educate people for a life outside of Tonga. During these decades membership jumped from 3,000 to 12,000 (Bristch 1985; Wood-Ellem 2001).

There are countless possible reasons why Mormonism was—and is—appealing to Tongans. According to data from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, as of 2016 Mormons make up sixty percent of the population. The Tongan census from 2011, however, reports that Mormons make up just under twenty percent. Either way that puts

Mormons at either the first or second most popular religion in Tonga. The schools are a major factor to their success, as many students do go on to earn degrees overseas—often in the US, and this is facilitated by the fact that the Mormon schools have a reputation for rigorous education in English. Even those who do not go on to a university have opportunities to serve missions abroad. There are also mythic-historic-scriptural<sup>7</sup> reasons why Tongans and all Pacific Islanders are elevated within Mormonism. And, of course, there is the highly practical matter, that Mormons “only ask for ten percent.”

Mormon tithing also began with the understanding that ten percent was a small amount to ask of its members. It marked a shift away from their nineteenth-century utopian communal living experiment towards one that eventually fully embraced capitalism. Tithing was introduced by Joseph Smith himself when he realized that the “United Order” was not motivating people to earn more money, which he realized was detrimental to growth (Leone 1979). Tithing was thought to incentivize people since they would keep ninety percent of what they earned, rather than surrendering it all to the church for redistribution. Mark Leone writes: “tithing was a divine institution and, as such, ensured the church’s economic strength while guaranteeing a full share of blessings to those who paid the full tithe” (1979:53). The idea was promoted from the beginning that tithing would lead to financial growth for the individual who paid it in full.

Physical and tangible proofs of God’s blessings are essential to Mormonism.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Book of Mormon* takes place in the Americas with a group of people who are descended from a prophet of Israel who is said to have sailed to the Americas from Jerusalem. Among his many descendants were a group called Nephites; there was a Nephite ship builder named Hagoth who sent ships of people on voyages of discovery “west.” Some of these ships perished at sea, some returned, and some had unknown fates. It is the ships of unknown fates that have led Mormons to speculate that these original Nephite seafarers are the people who populated the Pacific Islands (Parsons 1992).



When people in Tonga complain that Mormons are “showing off” because their schools and their buildings are so nicely built, it is actually quite in line with how the LDS Church wants to present itself. Granted, it is meant to be a modest show of success to underscore the blessings they receive by following the true path to God and salvation. Leone argues that tithing had (and has) two meanings for Mormons. The first is spiritual, as tithing was a primary way to gain favor with God and was also essential to salvation and one’s place in the next life. This is because one must fully tithe in order to have access to the temple for Endowment rituals (a necessity for heaven). The second is that tithing is the key to success in this life. It is repeatedly emphasized that tithing will lead to financial, material, and spiritual blessings (Leone 1979).

### **Other Affects from Churches on People’s Money**

The various Christian denominations in Tonga influence people’s finances beyond the expected church contributions. It is seen both explicitly, through actual suggestions regarding how people ought to manage their money, and implicitly, through the types of socializing and events that are encouraged among congregants.

### ***Methodists***

Baker established a precedent of using elements of Tongan culture to his advantage and to benefit other missionaries and ministers. Niumeitolu argues that joining the Methodist ministry was one of the early ways in which commoner families could become upwardly mobile in Tonga (1993). Nineteenth-century missionaries in Tonga, more-so

than in other Pacific locations, befriended the elite and were themselves elevated in status. When the Methodist Mission gained its independence, thanks to Shirley Baker, and became a church with the ability to train Tongan clergy, the individuals who became ministers and their families also enjoyed a newly elevated status (Rutherford 1996). Additionally, the ministry was a profession that tended to stay in families, with sons often pursuing the same career as their fathers. The children of Methodist ministers also tended to intermarry with other clergy families, further underscoring its position as a new system of status, parallel to (or possibly replacing, to a degree) the chiefly system (Numeitolu 1993). Protestant ministers were uniquely set up for this family dynasty dynamic because, unlike Catholic priests, they were allowed to marry and have children, and unlike Mormons,<sup>8</sup> they are paid, trained, and can consider the ministry their full-time profession. The elevated status of Methodist ministers is clear in many ways, beyond their impressive and large homes.

One informant of mine, Sela, was from Papua New Guinea. She met her Tongan husband at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji; they lived in Vava'u with their school-aged children, and were both teachers at the Wesleyan High School. I met Sela at a funeral where she was taking on a familiar role of both joking and complaining about Tongan culture to me. She told me her kids were complaining to her about all the people who were sleeping at their house because of the funeral and how they couldn't sleep because of it. "I told them, 'don't complain to me! This is not my culture, it's your

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<sup>8</sup> The LDS Church has no paid or professional clergy; all positions are served on a volunteer basis.

father's!' It's crazy," she continued "I can't sleep either because I have too many mats under my mattress. It's excessive! Plus it makes no sense. I'm from PNG and there when someone dies *everyone else* pays for the funeral and takes care of the family, but here if your father dies, you have to do everything and pay for it all." The funeral where I met Sela was for a relative of her husband; he was old and sick, so it was expected. He was also related to Mahina, which is relevant, as we shall see.

"They're expensive too," Sela leaned in and told me. We were sitting at the long table where they served the very formulaic funeral "tea"—which was a full meal of hard-boiled eggs, fried chicken, hot dogs, and taro, in addition to cups of hot, sugary, milky tea. Every funeral tea had these foods, in addition to bags of raw meat passed out to everyone at the burial, plus the buns and cans of Fanta given out every day between the death and the funeral after the evening prayers at the morgue. Sela continued "all the ministers get a thousand *pa'anga* just for being here."

"Really?" I asked. I had assumed that the bulk of the expense for funerals was in food and making sure everyone had a big enough collection of mats to give to the father's sister, or *fahu* (the one who is above law, the highest ranked person at an event), and reciprocate all the gifts given.

"Yes. They also get mats. Mats and cash."

Later in the car, Mahina and her sister were having a heated discussion, but I could not tell what it was about. Finally, she told me: "we are angry because someone from our family should have been the *fahu* at this funeral, but instead they chose the local noble because he had given the family land and helped them. It's not right though, it

should have been someone from our family because we are related through the sister.”

“Through who’s sister?”

“The man who died,” he was an old man, maybe in the generation of Mahina’s grandparents “his auntie is our relative, so someone from our line should be *fahu*.”

They were pretty upset, so I asked why they wanted to be the *fahu*.

Vahine answered “they give gifts to the family, sometimes very nice things. Money, mats, jewelry, rings. And you get first pick of what everyone brings to the family.”

There is no incentive for ministers, or anyone in power in the Methodist churches, to try to “tone down” events or even change them. They are expensive and at times hugely burdensome on families, but ministers reap the benefits. Bringing in my motif of wideness and narrowness, already it is clear that Methodist feasting is “wide”—it is dependent upon expansive networks of people, and participation in feasts fosters a relationship to money that pushes wealth outward toward extended kin and draws it in from the wide networks of people. Moreover, Methodists are physically making their bodies wider through eating and sitting. The Methodist church encourages this wideness regarding money in other aspects of life as well. Money is not to be kept close and hoarded for an individual, but is given out broadly, in large amounts to the church, to the ministers, to relatives. When there is not enough, people call upon their wide networks to send money. This is neither shameful nor reserved for “emergencies,” but considered practically a pillar of Tongan culture.

Methodist ministers warn congregants about capitalistic attitudes towards money with the familiar and oft repeated platitude: “Do not make money your God” sometimes

with the added “like *palangis* do.” This generous approach to money, to the point of financial ruin for some people, is virtuous.

### ***Mormons***

It is no wonder that ‘Una reported having more money after he converted to the LDS Church. I can see the appeal, in the context of Tonga, because the LDS Church does provide an alternative way of managing money and otherwise expensive ceremonial responsibilities, but within a context of obeying God and firmly planted within a religious-moral framework. Tongan Mormons are empowered to forge a new path of life events without rejecting or disrespecting family. If relatives and friends are offended, or talk badly about someone for their choices, that is okay and expected because persecution is part and parcel of the Mormon experience.

The precise tithing is necessarily accompanied by budgeting. Mormon informants regularly and casually mentioned their budgets in both conversation and interviews. The father of a friend of mine had a small feast to plan and in telling me about it he said several times that he had to be careful to “stick to my budget.” In an interview about funerals, an informant told me that he would only provide enough food as was possible within his budget.

Many informants emphasized the modesty of different Mormon celebrations. A recently returned missionary who had served in New Zealand was delighting in explaining both Mormon and Tongan things to me. He told me that if children are raised in the church, the normal age to be baptized is eight. Families celebrate it with a small party;

usually they just bring ice cream for everyone. During the Saineha High School (LDS-affiliated) reunion in Vava'u, the most common gatherings were not feasts, but dances, where the expense is drastically reduced. Dances were the most standard way to celebrate anything, sometimes there were “small feasts” as well, like when missionaries returned, but the main event that everyone was invited to would always be a dance. In my interviews about funerals, detailed in Chapter 7, my Mormon informants outlined specific ways in which they would host smaller funerals, and they told me their justifications for this were rooted in responsibility, logic, and wisdom.

Mormons are also using a moral framework to justify their position on money. Giving up things like cigarettes, alcohol, and kava have multi-faceted benefits for Mormons: it's better for your health, better for your family, and you save money since you are not wasting it on these vices. Saving money is elevated to the same level as caring for one's body and relationships. Saving money is also keeping money to yourself, which is what the Methodist ministers warn people about when stating their congregants should “not make money their god.”

Additionally, there are clear guidelines for Mormons as to who should receive your financial help. One's immediate family—a nuclear family of spouses and children—are a person's primary responsibility, both physically and spiritually. Mormons are encouraged to live within their means, to educate others on the importance of working and earning, and to spend money on investments, like home ownership, rather than consumables (Ashton 1975). Again, as with the blessings that come with paying a full tithe, church members are promised blessings for making responsible financial decisions.

As the Methodists approach to money fits within a motif of wideness, Mormons, on the other hand, manage their finances in a way that is symbolically narrow. The individual, the married couple, and their children are the family that matters. Individual responsibility, individual earning power, and measured, modest choices are all encouraged. In the following chapter, I will look at how this Mormon approach to money is further underscored through church dances and how the motif of narrowness, in terms of money, bodies, and family is seen and understood.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Mormon Dances**

Chairs lined the perimeter of the tennis court filled with older Mormon couples sitting next to each other while kids, teenagers, and young adults took to the dance floor to dance to a popular Indo-Fijian reggae dance song (see Photo 5.1). Balloons and streamers decorated the tall chain-link fence that surrounded the court, a DJ with a large collection of speakers was set up on one side, and cars were parked outside with a significant number of young people also sitting and watching, or hanging out and listening to the DJ's music. Some of the young men were dressed to come into the dance eventually with hoodies over their white-collared shirts and ties, and others seemed intent to stay outside. It was already dark by 7:30pm, as it was almost year-round in Vava'u, but the dance court was brightly lit, making it easy to see and be seen—and people were dressed to be seen.

This dance was in Talihau, which was at the far eastern edge of the island and I had gone there with my friend Timote, his sisters, and his parents. Like many occasions in Tonga, I paid very close attention to the clothing of everyone around me because I felt improperly dressed in my loose maxi skirt, a too-casual jersey top, flip flops, and no accessories. It was the standard outfit I wore around town and, in terms of modesty, it was generally “safe” for most events. As it turned out, it was a little too safe for a Mormon



dance. Not only were women well-accessorized in bold statement jewelry, but every piece of their outfits was stylishly on trend with looks from the United States. It did not immediately register that the women were also following explicit rules of modesty, because compared to what was generally required in Tonga, some outfits were borderline risqué. My favorite outfit of the night was a bright yellow, short-sleeved, form-fitting dress that stopped at the knees. The girl wore it with very high black heels, bright pink lipstick, and her long hair pulled slightly back on one side to show off large gold hoop earrings.

It was more obvious that the men at the dance were following a dress code as virtually every one was wearing a white collared shirt and tie (see Photo 5.2). Some wore this with *tupenu* and dress sandals (similar foot-coverage to a shoe, but slightly open and worn without socks) or pants and dress shoes. It is possible that the reputation of Mormons “looking like *palangis*” is in response to how Mormon men dress, more-so than the women. Most men in Tonga, when dressing formally or casually for nearly anything besides physical labor, wear *tupenu*. A *tupenu* is a calf-length wrap skirt for men, tailored, with pockets, and in the same color-range as dress pants for men (khaki, dark blue, black, brown). They are only more colorful when part of a school uniform, and then they are the school’s colors (royal blue, sky blue, Kelly green, orange, gray, maroon). Between the tropical climate and the frequent occasions of sitting on mats on the floor, *tupenu* are the more practical and comfortable option in Tonga. Nevertheless, sometimes men wear dress pants, and usually those men are Mormon. The men at the dance had less creative leeway than the women, but the high school boys exercised all they had within Mormon dress

code rules with shortly cropped but asymmetrical hair, and ties tied exaggeratedly short and wide, sometimes so they hung only five or six inches from the knot.

As I tried to figure out what I would do differently the next time I went to a Mormon dance, I thought about the catalogue of places I had been in Vava'u and what kinds of clothes I was supposed to wear to each of these. I had this catalogue of places because I had repeatedly shown up in the wrong attire to virtually every place I went. So I would often spend time looking closely at what everyone else was wearing and thinking about what I should do differently next time. My church skirts (for Catholic mass) at first were too tight and too informal, so I bought fabric and had a *pule taha* made—a long ankle-length maxi skirt and matching tailored blouse with a hem that covered the skirt and hit mid-thigh. *Pule taha* are what most of the Tongan women wore at church. My weaving clothes at first were too nice looking and uncomfortable for the work and weaving positions, so I started wearing t-shirts and leggings with a sarong tied around my waist, because the other women in my group wore similar things. Wearing pants in town made me look like a tourist in Vava'u, so I started to only wear skirts. Wearing skirts in town in Tongatapu made me look like a missionary, so I wore clothes I would wear in the US. After one summer visiting I decided that black seemed like the safest color to wear because Tongans were always wearing black clothes, so for fieldwork I packed a bunch of black outfits only to find out that Tongans only wear black when they are mourning someone specific. This constant feeling of “getting it wrong” in terms of how I was dressing my own body ranged from mildly frustrating to utterly tormenting. By the time I left I had things fairly well figured out and had amassed my own collection of appropriate clothes

for the range of places I ended up going, but of course, my fieldwork was almost over at that point.

The Mormon dance was a new place in the clothing landscape for me. I asked for advice on what to wear to dances many times and was given a range responses by my friends. Mahina told me she had no idea and that I should probably not go to the dance. Emily, my Peace Corps friend and neighbor, told me to wear something close to what we would wear to Vava'u's one night club, but slightly more modest. Timote told me to wear something pretty and not old fashioned. Kolina told me to wear something cool.

### **Microcosm of Mormon Values**

The values asserted at a Mormon dance are like a microcosm of Mormon values generally, and the ones I am highlighting particularly contrast with mainstream Tongan culture. In some ways, the Mormons are proposing (and living) shifts in cultural values and demeanor that young people across various religious backgrounds in Tonga are looking to embrace. But in the context of Tonga, these shifts are unique, because they are so clearly presented and connected to one particular church. Analogous ways of rejecting Tongan culture have a “naughty,” secretive, or rebellious aspect to them. Specifically, Mormon dances assert a form of dating that privileges individual agency among youth and one that contrasts with a kava club model of young people romantically meeting one another. The dances also promote nuclear families and eternal, romantic, monogamous marriages that contrast with expansive families, subtly arranged marriages, and nearly sanctioned infidelity for husbands. Other rejected or asserted values seen in a Mormon

dance setting are the rejection of the brother-sister *tapu*, the promotion of physical fitness, and the rejection of competitive giving in favor of financial “responsibility” and living within one’s means. All of these new forms of living correspond to a privileging of the individual and narrowing of not only one’s body but also of one’s social connections.

Dances promote fellowship within the LDS Church family to specifically bolster heterosexual marital matches between young Mormons. They are not only given opportunities to dance in couples and get to know many young people of the opposite sex, but young men are encouraged to confidently ask women for a dance, reinforcing male individual agency in the dating/marriage process, and female individual agency insofar as they are able to accept or decline invitations. These interactions happen in plain sight of the local Mormon families, and thus parents, relatives, and church members can observe this process, but are not actively involved in orchestrating it. That is not to say families do not wield considerable power “behind closed doors” in Mormon matchmaking, but at least on the dance floor, it is the choice of the young man, and to a lesser extent, the young woman. This is a major contrast to the traditional Tongan models of courtship (that are public and between families) and in mainstream Tongan culture, where to achieve this level of individual choice, young couples tend to pursue one another secretly.

Another key difference that represents a shift away from, a rejection of, or a minimizing of “the Tongan way” is the role of brothers and sisters in the LDS Church. At a kava club, if a man’s sister or cousin is serving kava, he cannot remain in the club be-

cause it is *tapu* for him to hear people flirting with her. Brother-sister avoidance<sup>9</sup> persists in other Tongan arenas along similar lines, but is changing. A friend of mine (Tongan but raised in the US and moved back to Tonga at age 19) was told by someone she did not know that she had to leave a local bar because her brother was there too. She did not leave and was irritated that someone told her to do so. When I interviewed people about what was changing in Tongan culture they would often mention that brothers and sisters did not “respect” each other anymore, that they currently sleep in the same house or watch movies together, and that this is not proper and not how things used to be—this is also reflected in Tongan ethnographies (McGrath 1993; Morton 1996; Small 1997). Mormons are shifting away from “traditional” culture but they are doing so deliberately and within the confines of specific rules and religious values. By contrast, when this shift occurs outside of the Mormon context, it often lacks propriety. The brother-sister avoidance does not extend to Mormon dances where brothers and sisters are flirting within close proximity of one another virtually the whole time.

Mormon dances are attended by the whole nuclear family and they also serve as an opportunity for this ideal family structure to be modeled to one another. The whole aspect of dances as a place to see and be seen not only helps enforce Mormon ideals on a range of fronts, but likely contributes to social pressures to be the “right” kind of Mormon. When slow songs are played at dances the first people up and dancing are the married couples of all ages (see Photo 5.3). This communicates so much that I did not see

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<sup>9</sup> The cross sibling relationship in Tonga is a relationship of respect due to the relative rank of sisters to brothers. As such, their interactions have traditionally been formal, restricted, and governed by sets of *tapu*.

elsewhere in Tonga: adults are supposed to be married and this is how you are the best version of a social person, married couples are supposed to be *romantically* in love for their whole lives and eternity, and they are monogamous. There is no room for divorce, transition to friendship or a platonic love, or infidelity. This glaringly contrasts with pre-Christian Polynesian marital arrangements which were often temporary or only to produce children and then other sexual configurations were understood as okay. This Mormon approach to marriage also contrasts with contemporary Tongan relationships in other ways. There are not really opportunities for other couples of any age to publicly demonstrate their affection for one another, should they find that necessary. It seems that Mormons are expected to perform this *romantic* attachment for their whole lives—it is not enough to be married forever, but the romance must also be maintained (or performed). Although no Christian denomination supports marital infidelity or wants marriages to end in divorce, it is this enduring romance is a specifically Mormon approach to curtailing potential marital problems.

Physical health is upheld amongst Mormons as a vital component to living a religiously observant life. It is most clearly seen doctrinally through the “Word of Wisdom,” which refers to a passage in the *Doctrine and Covenants* imploring adherents to consume fruits and vegetables, little meat, and no coffee, tea, alcohol, tobacco or addictive substances. Many Christians use the Biblical adage that “bodies are temples of the Lord” to reinforce sexual mores; while that is also true for Mormons, the additional advice on dietary regulations and physical activity extends the temple analogy beyond sexual activity. Healthy bodies are a doctrinal goal for Mormons, and the encouragement of this extends

to physical fitness as well. Mormon missionaries have designated exercise time built into their daily routines and the multi-sport courts that accompany most church buildings are used by church members. Dances, in particular contrast to feasts, help members uphold these doctrines pertaining to bodily management in that they are an occasion for fellowship and celebration that does not involve eating (except for some candy), and the primary activity is exercise.

Finally, in contrast as well to feasting, dances are much less burdensome resource-wise on church members and the community. Feasting (as seen in particular in Chapter 3) is a huge financial burden to the feast hosts and relatives of the hosts, both locally and abroad. Feasts also require a significant amount of time from the hosts, relatives, and neighbors to prepare the food, and tend to use up a large share of the families' root crops and feast animals. Unlike feasting, however, dances require minimal preparation, except for the bodily preparation of oneself and one's children in terms of bathing, acquiring and wearing the right clothes and accessories, and possibly preparing one's hair and makeup. If extra money is being spent on dressing, then it is notable that the money is being put towards specific things that only one person wears, rather than food that is intended to be shared and distributed. In terms of preparation, dances are held on church grounds, they are decorated sometimes with streamers and balloons, and there is a DJ hired for the event who provides his own sound equipment. This form of fellowship, which is minimally financially burdensome, also serves to model personal financial responsibility—another major tenet of LDS teachings seen through the strict tithing policy, encouragement across the board of careful budgeting, and church publications on money manage-

ment that underscore the importance of living within one's means.

A Mormon approach to money contrasts hugely with the common Tongan approach. Other Tongans may see Mormons as stingy and themselves as generous; while Tongan Mormons may see other Tongans as irresponsible and themselves as wise in financial matters. In addition to funding expensive feasts, Tongans often financially support extended family and somewhat distant (from a Western point of view) relatives without explicit expectation of being repaid. People are also subject to immense family pressures to give to one another. Of course, many willingly give, but expectations often (more often than not) exceed actual available resources and many people fall into debt from burdensome funerals, feasts and, as just mentioned, church donations (James 1997, Lee 2006; Lee 2009). Money is seen similarly to other objects or resources, particularly food, in Tonga in that if you have anything then you have enough to share. From this point of view, the idea of saving is almost greedy. For Mormons, responsible management of money is essential to many aspects of life. The best way to help relatives is to help them earn money for themselves; likewise, the importance of earning money is a lesson to be taught to children early in life (Ashton 1975). Money should be spent on investments, like home ownership, rather than consumables, like feasting. Budgeting is key to money management along with learning self-discipline with spending (Ibid).

Church dances, therefore, help Mormons uphold doctrine in multiple ways that are particularly relevant in Tonga. Members are building up their community by socializing and celebrating together, and possibly drawing new members into the church. Dances are an opportunity for young people to get to know each other and consider marital part-



ners, all while being surrounded by happily married couples. Young people can see their future Mormon lives flash before their eyes at a dance since all generations are usually present. The physical action of dancing is exercise, and in contrast to feasts, is a way to celebrate that does not involve sitting and eating but involves movement and not eating. Finally, dances are a social activity and a celebration that is minimally financially burdensome on members, allowing people to fully participate in church life without compromising their budgets.

### **Saineha High School Reunion Dances**

One of my trips to Tonga coincided with the Saineha High School Reunion, which took place over two weeks in July. Like the Wesleyan Conference, it also drew back the diaspora, with alumni and their families arriving by boat and plane; they were greeted by friends and family and occasionally a DJ to make the atmosphere even more festive. Although people returned to Vava'u from overseas, and likely some people came from the capitol, it was not on the same scale as those who arrived for the Wesleyan Conference.

Just as the Wesleyan Conference was most marked by multiple feasts every day, the Saineha High School Reunion was marked by dances almost every night, hosted by different wards (congregations) in different villages around the island. LDS Church organization is such that meeting houses or chapels are spread throughout the island. One benefit of not having professional clergy is that there are few barriers to having a church service, or “sacrament meeting,” as they are officially called. By contrast there are only a few Catholic churches and chapels in Vava'u, and only two priests—and the presence of a

priest is required for Mass. Nearly every village had an LDS Church building. Some were small, but others were larger or part of a compound of facilities including a main meeting building, classrooms, a family history center with computers that had access to genealogy databases, and a multi-sport court outfitted for basketball, tennis, volleyball, and of course, church dances.

The buildings and grounds are uniform, well-constructed, and well maintained. They serve as a point of pride for Mormons on multiple levels. They are a physical example of the number of members in the church. With nearly every village having its own Mormon chapels, it clearly communicates that there are Mormons, at least officially, in every village. Church buildings are built based on need, rather than speculation, so they are an actual expression of recorded, baptized members. It seems as though most of the sturdy, concrete church buildings were constructed in the 1980s. Britsch reports on it in his book that overviews the work of the LDS Church in the Pacific: “replacing old coconut-frond *fale* chapels and building attractive modern structures to house the constantly growing wards and branches of Tonga has been a major continuing undertaking” (1985:537). He continues the description of the church facilities in relation to a 1982 hurricane: “As is so often the case in disaster it brought out some of the best in human behavior and demonstrated the great strength of the LDS Church. ... not one LDS chapel was destroyed. They were quickly repaired and used as temporary shelters for non-members as well as members” (Britsch 1985:538). Nearly an identical event happened during my fieldwork. There was a cyclone that hit Ha’apai the hardest and destroyed both crops and homes; the LDS Church (my Mormon informants told me) offered

the quickest aid in terms of shelter in their well-constructed buildings, and through disaster relief food donations. The church buildings are a big deal, and that is not mentioning the temples, which are the most important buildings.

I went to the dances in different villages all around the island with my Mormon friend, Timote, who picked me up each night just before 7:00 pm with his entire immediate family, and they all dropped me off just after 10:00 pm when the dances ended. Sometimes before the dance, the car would stop in front of a “Chinese store” (the little grocery or convenience stores are so named because they are owned by Chinese people) and one of Timote’s sisters would get out and buy candy to take to the dance. We drove all over Vava’u to these different dances during the reunion week and, after a while, I had the same feeling of exhaustion that I got when there was suddenly an avalanche of things to do in Tonga. So many events seemed layered up all the time during events like family reunions, funerals, and church conferences. Even church holidays all took multiple, back-to-back days of gatherings—granted, that made sense when people were traveling long distances to be there. The dances were predictable though, with clear start and end times and more or less the same format of dancing at each one.

The first dance of the reunion was at the high school on their large tennis court. The governor (a noble and Mormon) was there with his wife and they were sitting in “guest of honor” seats during the dance. The chairs for the governor and his wife were on the perimeter of the court, but centered, and covered in barkcloth. The rest of the perimeter was lined with a double row of identical sturdy plastic chairs. The seats were almost entirely full of people of all ages, and, because it was the biggest dance, outside of the

fence there were more people watching, talking, possibly waiting to go in or, like at the other dances, just planning to stay out and watch. I was sitting inside the tennis court with Timote in the chairs next to some people he knew and a young Tongan woman who traveled here from the US with her parents. Most people at the dance were Tongan, but some *palangis* were there too—some were local, I recognized but did not know them—and others it looked like were married to Tongan spouses and came for the reunion with their children as well. Just like when I went to Easter Mass and saw many people I did not know were Catholic, at this big dance I saw people I knew, but I had no idea they were Mormon. Of course, it was not a requirement to be Mormon to be there, but I asked Timote, and he assured me that almost everyone there was Mormon.

This reunion-opening dance also featured *tau'olunga* dances by young women. A *tau'olunga* is a traditional Tongan performance dance danced by a virginal woman. Much like Hawaiian *hula*, the dance itself tells a story and is meant to be serious, poetic, and beautiful. Dancers usually wear Tongan textiles—either woven mats or barkcloth—along with prescribed accessories like a shell necklace, bracelets and anklets (often with *maile* leaves), coconut palm spine hair ornaments, and oiled skin (see Photo 5.4). The oiled skin serves as the proof of her virginity: dancers are oiled beforehand and if the oil soaks in it is said that then she is not virgin, but if it stays on top and makes the skin look shiny, then that is proof of her virginity. Shininess is often a desirable aesthetic quality also seen in *kie* leaves and satin outfits. There is little variation in this ensemble, which contributes to a dance's quality and authenticity. Normally a dancer is given money from audience members as a compliment to her dance; cash is either pressed on to her oiled skin or

tucked in to her costume somewhere, if it falls off, someone collects it for her at the end. Men, to compliment the dancer, will sometimes dance around her spontaneously, but in a standard format. It adds levity and excitement to the performance, usually making the audience more exuberant. *Tau'olunga* are common dances and I have seen them performed at feasts, pageants, the festival for the King's birthday, a wedding, and here for the Mormon High School Reunion.

After the *tau'olunga* a woman gave a short welcoming speech that involved asking the dance-goers to stand, in turn, if they had come to Vava'u from Ha'apai, Tongatapu, then New Zealand, Australia, and America. The woman made small complimentary comments after each group stood, either additionally welcoming them, or remarking, for example, how cold it must be in New Zealand right now. When the alumni and their families from the US stood, the woman with the microphone exclaimed "oooh and the families from America! Don't they look rich?" After more laughter, thanking, and welcoming, the dancing finally began.

### **Returned Missionary Dance**

The dances on many levels reinforce many Mormon values, both generally, and as mentioned, in specific contrast to Tongan culture. Since they were also the primary means of celebrating for Tongan Mormons and were times when many people gathered together, dances also ended up highlighting some of the contradictions that accompanied being Tongan and Mormon at the same time.

The last dance I attended during my fieldwork was for Velonika, a recently re-

turned missionary. She had served her mission in the US and returned with a cohort of five other young women from Vava'u, the rest of whom either served in the US or Mexico. Missionary life is difficult with women serving for eighteen months and men serving for two years. Their time as missionaries is full of restrictions, which are designed to help them focus on their mission work and their own faith. These include refraining from media consumption that is not from the church, only two phone calls per year—on Christmas and Mother's Day—are permitted; all other communication must be written, and extremely limited internet access is permitted one day per week. Dress is extra conservative for men and women. Dating someone from home is discouraged, and there is absolutely no dating in the mission field. Returning from a successfully completed mission is a major life moment and also marks the time when people begin seriously looking for their spouse. The group of returned missionaries all attended each other's honorary dances held in their home villages and all were very stylishly dressed. Something about their confidence made it clear who they were, as if they all knew everyone was paying attention to them as a group.

It appeared to be a normal Mormon dance from the beginning until about 9:00 pm, when the DJ had Velonika come out to the middle of the court while the local bishop took the microphone and praised her missionary work. Then four women, possibly her sisters or cousins, came out dressed in matching flowy dark red satin skirts and white blouses; their hair was down and loose and they wore flower *kahoa* (like a Hawaiian *lei*, a large necklace typically made from scented flowers—also sometimes made out of candy) around their necks. The DJ played what sounded to me like a cheesy, saccharine

Hawaiian-esq song, sung in English, while the four women performed a “Polynesian” dance. This type of dance was somewhat common, like the *tau’olunga*, and they were both performed in similar circumstances. Some of my older Tongan informants complained about these flowy, sometimes hip-shaking dances, saying that they look terrible and that girls just learn them “from the internet.”

Embracing other Pacific dances, to varying degrees of quality, may be different for Tongan Mormons because of their connection to the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii, which is a “living museum” owned by the church, and a very popular tourist attraction. Many students at BYU-Hawaii who are from Pacific Islands work at the Polynesian Cultural Center as guides, dancers, or demonstrators in the recreated villages that represent Hawaii, Tahiti, the Marquesas, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and New Zealand. Thus, there are BYU-PCC alumni in Vava’u, who teach Polynesian dances to young men and women locally.

After her sisters danced for her, Velonika’s family presented her father’s sister, the local bishop, and the highest ranked Mormon in attendance, the stake president,<sup>10</sup> each with a modest textile gift—one small, white, decorated mat. In other contexts, this gift could be much more grand, with a stack of mats or a stack of cash accompanying the textiles. After the gifts were presented, Velonika still stood in the middle of the court and different women attending the dance pulled bunches of candy *kahoa* out of their purses and handed them to people sitting around them. These people then lined up—indeed, it

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<sup>10</sup> In LDS Church organization a stake president is in charge of ten to twelve “wards,” or congregations, in his geographic area.

seemed like everyone was lining up—and they put the candy *kahoa* around Velonika's neck or handed her cash while shaking her hand. By the end she was covered in so many *kahoa* that her face was barely visible and it looked like she might fall over. People took photos of her with phones, digital cameras, and some iPads. Different people also took turns on the microphone praising her work and her family's support of her and the work of the church.

Finally, the bishop concluded the speeches while women helped her take off the *kahoa* and distributed them to the dance-goers, who then opened the cellophane and further distributed the candy to people around them and ate it themselves. That was unexpected. Despite being the end of my fieldwork, I still somehow assumed all those necklaces full of candy were given to her to keep, not given to her as a gesture and for the photos and with every intention to distribute to the people at the dance. The DJ played a few more songs and children ran around crazily and ate candy. The dance ended at 10:00 pm, as always.

The dance itself was more “celebratory” than most dances, since Velonika had been away from home for so long under restrictive, faith-developing circumstances and had returned possibly at the height of her commitment to the church. Moreover, this also marked the occasion when she could really begin looking for a husband. Due to all of this, her dance was more resource-burdensome than normal, as her family had the expense of buying gifts for relatives and the church leaders, as well as candy for the *kahoas* given to her and distributed to the people at the dance, and the dance-goers had the expense of giving cash to Velonika.



Family feasts often accompany the welcoming home of a missionary as well, but the main church event, and the one to which everyone is invited, is the dance at which the missionary himself or herself is honored. Since feasts are small and possibly just for the family, the dance may take on greater significance in terms of helping Tongan Mormons feel like they are still being generous in the Tongan way, as there is an event to which everyone is welcome. These seemingly small points of compromise are probably very important, because Mormons in Tonga sometimes report feeling like (or knowing that) their extended families talk badly about them. It seems as though all of the practices that could be contradictions between Tongan and Mormon values, end up serving as compromises. Feasting still happens as a celebration, but the feasts are small. Family rank is important as the father's sister is still honored, but the gifts to her are modest. External rank matters as well, but church rank is equally or more important than chiefly rank. Rites of passage are still celebrated, but they are Mormon ones, like a returned missionary or temple marriage, rather than a twenty-first birthday (first and twenty-first birthdays are the most important in Tonga) or funeral.

## **Conclusion**

The dance and the Mormon values encapsulated within it fit into the motif of narrowness. Narrowness correlates with “the *palangi* way” and Western values rooted in individualism, capitalism, and self-sufficiency—all of which are seen in Tonga in regard to how people manage their bodies, families, and money. This motif of narrowness in particular contrasts with wideness, which represents “the Tongan way” and Tongan values

such as reciprocal giving, generosity, and large networks maintained through giving. It is important to look at dress and clothing at this event to parse out what people are referencing and intentionally communicating (Colchester 2003; Tarlo 1996). No doubt there is an intention to express Mormon religious identity, as well as a host of features that correlate with Mormonness (Tarlo 2010). Following Keane's assertion that dress invites actions and makes certain things possible (2005), I suggest that the absence of *ta'ovala* and wearing "*palangi*" styles clothes that conjure a Mormon identity empowers wearers to act in ways that read as "*palangi*" that without the Mormonness, would seem rude. In particular, embracing one's individual agency in romantic situations, exhibiting restraint and measured responsibility towards money and in giving, and recognizing and honoring the nuclear family.

The other ways in which the motif of narrowness is expressed is through the act of dancing (and exercising), which makes bodies smaller, rather than feasting which makes bodies bigger. The relationship to money that is encouraged by using dances as the primary form of celebrating and gathering is also one that aligns with narrowness. Money is to be budgeted with an honest and modest ten percent given to the church. The remaining ninety percent is to be used, spent, and saved wisely, by a husband and wife. People are discouraged from using their money on "consumables," a category under which many or most Tongan expenses could fall. Thus, money is "narrowly" kept close to the individuals in charge of it and to be used for the nuclear family, with a small amount extended out to the church.

If the wide/narrow framework fits awkwardly anywhere for Tongan Mormons, it

is with families. The LDS Church is a group with an expansive local and international network of fellow “brothers and sisters in Christ;” they are children of God. Additionally, married couples are encouraged to have many children so that they have a large nuclear family, and eventually many descendants. Relatives, both living and deceased, are known through meticulously kept genealogies—often recorded by families themselves as well as in church databases—to which members all over the world have access (Cannell 2013). Still, nuclear families are main family unit and the family that lives in one house. There is a bureaucratic side to Mormon networks that determines people as officially in the network or not, whether it is on the large-scale of church membership or on a smaller scale of families. By contrast to the Mormon model, Tongan families are differently configured, with less emphasis on the nuclear family and greater emphasis laterally outward to aunts, uncles, and cousins and these large, outward networks are somewhat fluid, and maintained through gifts of money, textiles, time, food, resources, and work.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Family and Money**

I had just started going to my weaving group and I wanted to get into a routine of walking to the hall where we met, but Tevita offered to give me a ride and I was already running late, so I agreed. My weaving group met in the next village over, but the walk was entirely residential rather than walking past garden plots referred to as “the bush.” People who lived further out referred to all of the villages close to Neiafu as “town.” Before we left, he and his wife asked me if I could help out with the water bill that month because it was very high. I was nervous that the bill was exceptionally high because of me being an additional person in the house and possibly taking more showers than I should because it was so hot; but also paying some bills was exactly the kind of thing I had in mind for contributing to the household, so I said yes, of course.

My fieldwork began with some housing trouble. I was going to Tonga on a shoe-string budget and I had worked out a place to stay for \$200 per month until my money ran out or until more funding came through. Many unexpected things happened when I arrived in Tonga, including staying in the capital in a hotel for weeks longer than planned, and then a completely unplanned stay in a hotel in Vava’u because my housing arrangement fell through entirely. Every night in the hotels ate into my budget and thus shortened

my timeline for this phase of fieldwork. I was panicking, thinking that I might have to stay in a hotel the whole time and basically waste my expensive plane ticket for a month of fieldwork. My alternative was a \$500 per month house somewhere, which was the going rent for white foreigners like myself, but that was even assuming I could find something like that immediately. Tevita had been my language teacher during my preliminary field work trips; he was my main point of contact and a friend. He was also taking his time helping me out with a place to stay, which irritated me and further worried me. Finally when I was over at his family's house eating and hanging out one evening, his mother-in-law asked me if I wanted to stay there for free with them—Tevita, his wife 'Ofa, their four kids, and 'Ofa's parents, who owned the house. I could stay the full six months, I thought quickly and almost immediately accepted the offer. It was such a relief that I did not even pick up on the little hints that not everyone in the house wanted that to happen.

Before he dropped me off at my weaving group, Tevita took me by the bank so I could withdraw some money for the water bill, which was a staggering \$200 (there was a leak). We went to the utility office to pay it. On the ride he asked if I could start giving some money every month for the bills. At first I was relieved because I wanted to contribute somehow to the household in a clear way knowing that “for free” did not, or should not, really mean that. I was also a little embarrassed at the request because I thought I *had* been contributing by buying food and general household things and it clearly did not seem that way to Tevita, or it was not enough, or it was all wrong somehow. “But this is okay,” I thought, “I can pay some bills every month and this will be some-

thing I can do to help out. I started recalculating the contents of my bank account trying to figure out what I could give and still stay the same amount of time, thinking maybe I could offer a generous \$100 per month. Before I said anything, Tevita suggested \$500 a month. “Shit,” I thought and choked back tears for about ten seconds and then actually started crying.

I had been at his house for just over a month. Just a month of feeling like things would be mostly okay—mostly because most of that month was taken up with being very sick. Now, I thought, I was back to square one. I felt a little betrayed that he and his family didn’t see me as a friend who would *turn into* family. I had every intention, in my halcyon view of what my fieldwork would be, that living together would be the beginning of an important relationship. I thought this family would become “my family” and that they understood that I did not have much money currently, but in the future when I finished everything and had a job that I would reciprocate generously. A lot of things were happening in that car. I was frantically re-calculating my bank account, I was upset that I seemed to have the exact same problems I had had a month before with my under-funded trip to Tonga, and I was offended that we clearly had different expectations of these relationships. I was worried that this was about me being white, or being not Tongan, and that Tevita and his family assumed that I would forget about them. I was worried that he thought I was holding out on him and I was embarrassed that I had handled everything wrong.

When I started crying Tevita told me how ashamed he was to ask for money because he was like my father and fathers should not ask their children for money, they

should be the ones taking care of them. I told him I did not think I had that much to spare and I asked him if \$300 a month would be enough. Maybe we were both sizing each other up then, maybe he thought my tears were fake and that I was playing him and I thought he was being greedy, bleeding me dry and that he did not believe a word I said about how little money I had.

I am not sure if admissions of shame accompanied standard fatherly requests for cash, but throughout my fieldwork I heard about many instances of fathers asking their employed, adult children for money.

One of the women in the Peace Corps was engaged to a man from Vava'u; he earned money from tattooing foreigners and painting the occasional commissioned *kupesi* (traditional Tongan design) to decorate local businesses. One day when she was at my neighbor Emily's house with some other Peace Corps girls and me, she was talking about the myriad challenges of saving money for a fiancé visa. It was in this context that she told us how her fiancé had just made \$600 from a tattoo, but then his dad came and took all of it because he needed to send some pigs and fish down to Tongatapu for his great-niece's first birthday party.

Another time I was with my friend Timote, who worked at the airport, and he had gotten off the phone with his father and was clearly annoyed. He said that his dad asked him for some money for the upcoming feast honoring his retirement as a bishop of his local Mormon ward. I had repeatedly heard Timote's father talk about the importance of sticking to his budget while planning this feast, but it seemed like the expenses were exceeding the plan.

Finally, one time when I was waiting for the doctor at the hospital, there was a nurse about my age who was eager to chat. I told her about what I was doing in Vava'u and that I was interested in weaving, families, traditions, and mostly how any of these things are changing. Then she exclaimed: "I can't wait for all of these Tongan things to change! All the young people with good jobs end up paying for the feasts and funerals... your family just takes your money, and what's the point of working if you can't keep any of the money you earn?" She paused for a moment and added "I should go work in Fiji."

### **Kainga Rank**

Of course there are reasons, entangled within the *kainga* or family rank system, why fathers and other certain relatives can make requests for money and expect them to be honored. Tongan family rank is based on several principles: females have higher status than males, *after* gender is taken into account then elder outranks younger (Kaeppler 1971; Biersack 1996; Morton 1996). Relatives on the paternal side have higher status than Ego, and those on the maternal side have lower status than Ego. In other words, as put by Tupou Posesi "you can stand on your mother's relations, but your father's relations stand on you" (Rogers 1977:158). These ranked positions determine behaviors between people as well, such as brother-sister avoidance and near equality of same sex siblings and same sex parallel cousins. Mothers give love and affections and fathers give discipline; demands can be made on the mother's brother, but the father's sister is to be respected and obeyed (Kaeppler 1971; Biersack 1996; Morton 1996). According to Adrienne Kaeppler: "These categories are determined by birth and do not change in an indi-



vidual's lifetime. Even though a man may inherit a noble's title, together with a great deal of land and material wealth, he still avoids his sister, treats his brothers nearly as an equal, defers to his father's sister and gives her anything she wants, demands pigs from his mother's brother, and allows his sister's children to take any of his possessions," (1971:177).

Even though people report that brothers and sisters do not "respect" each other anymore (McGrath 1993; Morton 1996), degrees of brother-sister avoidance are still appropriate or ideal. Once I was in a car with Timote and some of his coworkers, some people I knew and others I did not recognize. They were joking about a friend of theirs who must be "shucking coconuts" (masturbating) a lot lately because his wife was abroad in New Zealand and had been gone for a few months. Later Timote was telling me that he should not have said that in the car. At the time I did think it was a little crazy to joke like that in front of one's boss, but I asked why and he said because his boss Salote, and her brother were both in the car and "it's not okay for brothers and sisters to talk about those things or be around things like that together."

In addition to brother-sister avoidance, *kainga* rank also determines ceremonial positions in funerals in particular, as well as everyday interactions between people. Mothers are the parental source of love and comfort, while fathers are meant to be feared and respected. By extension, a mother's sister is nearly equal to her for her own children, but her brother, the *fa'e tangata* or male mother, can be the source of material help for his sister's children his entire life (Douaire-Marsaudon 1996; Kaeppler 1971). They can ask anything of him and expect it to be handed over, or simply take from him what they need.

Likewise, brothers should continue to take care of their sisters throughout life, by giving them gifts and material support generously (Ibid).

The father's sister is the opposite in terms of rank to the mother's brother. She is the *mehekitanga* (paternal aunt) and deserves all possible respect within the family and sometimes wields power over marriage decisions and distribution of gifts (Douaire-Marsaudon 1996). Her ability to curse disrespectful relatives helped the father's sister retain her power (Biersack 1996; Douaire-Marsaudon 1996; Rogers 1977). If she is Ego's father's sister, then her children outrank Ego. This ranking is most visible at funerals, but I also encountered it daily while living at Tevita and 'Ofa's house. As mentioned, there were five adults (including myself) and four children; the house was next door to 'Ofa's father's sister's house and whenever a big, special meal was cooked at our house one of the kids took a plate of food over to 'Ofa's *mehekitanga*. This was not because anyone thought she needed it or any kind of charity, because her children, grandchildren, or someone was certainly cooking food for her and anyone who was at the house. The plate of food was just a gift. Tevita explained to me once that it should be a gift and not charity: "it would be shameful for the brothers if their sister *needed* food and did not have it, this is to show respect and love. It is the same thing with the chiefs," he added "no one wants to see a chief out working in the fields because it would be too shameful for everyone. We would rather give all of our food than see that."

Even though officially a *mehekitanga* and her children can ask anything and take anything from Ego, that does not mean that that is the only direction of the flow of goods. Gifts of food and textiles at funerals, for example, go up the ranks and are temporarily

pooled at the top until they are divided and distributed to those below. Queen Salote considered herself to be very skilled at properly and fairly dividing and distributing food—which, granted at her level was slightly different, still requires knowing everyone's rank and position (Wood-Ellem 2001). Reciprocity is experienced through interaction with both paternal and maternal sides, or as Kaepler puts it: “the system of exchanges among the kainga can be characterized as indirect reciprocity, i.e., goods and services go from ego and his siblings to his patrilineal relatives, while he exacts goods and services from his matrilineal relatives” (1971:179).

The examples I encountered of fathers taking and asking from their children is still related to *kainga* rank. Such a request could be acceptable because the father and his sister are nearly equivalent positions (relative to Ego), just as the mother and her brother are. It is also likely that Christianity, and the associated Western gender norms, increased the role and authority of men, particularly as fathers and husbands. For example, the *mehekitanga* formerly exercised authority over marriage choices (Biersack 1996; Douaire-Marsaudon 1996; Rogers 1977). I knew a man in Vava'u who had arranged a marriage for his son. His son wanted to marry someone else he had met while working in the capital, but the father threatened disinheritance unless he married the woman the father had chosen for him. The son acquiesced. This example suggests that some of the power of the *mehekitanga* is diminished and transferred to the father, who in this case had material weight behind his threat.

*Kainga* rank is just one of several types of rank systems in Tonga. According to Kaepler there is also class, for example chiefly or commoner (and likely more categories

of class are presently emerging), and lineage rank, which is only relevant for the highest echelons of society (Besnier 2009; Kaeppler 1971). *Kainga* rank is determined by birth within a network of other ranked people and can shift based on relative position. Class is relevant particularly as it is shifting and based on a variety of markers such as individual achievement through education and one's career; wealth, as demonstrated by a large house or owning businesses; and connections abroad, either close relatives or one's own experience living overseas (Besnier 2009).

### ***Fatongia* and the Chiefly System**

Paternal requests for money also mirror the practice of *fatongia*, “the right of a chief to the labor and goods of his people” (Rutherford 1996:7). *Fatongia* was abolished through the Emancipation Edict of 1862 when commoners were officially freed from the burdens of life under chiefs and the majority of chiefs and their families effectively lost their powers. The remaining twenty-two chiefs were promoted by King George Tupou I to nobility with hereditary titles (Campbell 1992). As mentioned in Chapter 4, all of this maneuvering was intended to centralize power under the king and quell potential rivalries, but it had additional effects on the status systems at work in Tonga. Although the descendants of the demoted chiefs hold no official status, they are unofficially recognized and locally known. Informants would occasionally point out chiefly-descended people to me or introduce me to someone who had a chiefly lineage but was not a noble. Two things came out of this shift in 1862 that are relevant here. The first is that the whole rank system was dramatically changed and the promotion/demotion of chiefs left a vacuum as

to how to stratify people who became officially commoners. The second, which is possibly a result of this Emancipation Edict, is that now all men act like chiefs, particularly within the family. It seems as though *fatongia*, rather than being abolished, just became ultra-domesticated and is the rule of households now rather than becoming a relic of history, which is how my informants talked about *fatongia*. When the emancipation of commoners is discussed and celebrated, as it is on June 4 annually, people talk about being free from the obligations of chiefs. While that is technically true, it did not seem like my Tongan informants were free from other kin obligations.

The bulk of the changes to commoner rank happened under Queen Salote (reigned from 1918-1965); one major element that predated her rule was the upward mobility of some commoner families through professions within the Methodist churches. Queen Salote's interest in commoner welfare went beyond that of monarch to her subjects. Her agenda in the promotion and welfare of commoners, besides fulfilling chiefly and queenly duties, was based on securing her own role (Wood-Ellem 2001). The queen's biographer, Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, clearly lays out the deficiencies people saw in her genealogy and, as a result, a faction of nobles supported her younger half-sister's rule instead (2001). Second, Wood-Ellem notes the enduring impact that the news of the Russian Revolution and the fate of the Russian Imperial Family had on Queen Salote; she was keenly aware of the precarious position of monarchies in the twentieth century. In response to these experiences, Queen Salote focused on ingratiating herself with commoner Tongans and she specifically promoted them in meaningful and symbolic ways that effectively elevated the rank of commoners as an entire class (Ibid).

Two of the main legacies of Queen Salote's long reign are her support of improved education and healthcare, both of which she strongly wanted to be Western-oriented. She made education free and compulsory and rewarded the educational achievements of individuals. Her son Tupouto'a was the first Tongan to graduate from a university, earning his Bachelor's Degree in 1942. Wood-Ellem writes that she "was aware that many chiefs were not worthy of their high position in Tongan society, and her response was to encourage, regardless of rank, those who showed ability, were personally loyal to her, and were willing to work for the benefit of others and for the kingdom as a whole" (2001:298). Her specific promotion of talented individuals to positions in the government and her personal employment, regardless of rank, set a new tone for status and stratification in Tonga. A new system of rank emerged that was no longer primarily connected to genealogies, but to ambition, skill, talent, and education (Besnier 2009).

The Queen was also known for her advancement and preservation of Tongan culture. For instance, as noted at the beginning of this dissertation, in 1953 she formally required all Tongans to wear *ta'ovala* when entering any church or government buildings (Addo 2013). This seemingly small act of a dress code was not only symbolically very meaningful, but also had rippling effects on Tongan culture that are still seen today. There is a long historical association across the Pacific with wrapping and high rank (see Chapter 2), primarily due to the use of wrapping to contain the dangerous sanctity that was embodied in the chiefly person (Babadzan 2003; Gell 1995; Valeri 1985). By requiring this additional piece of clothing to be worn, Queen Salote possibly promoted everyone to a higher status. This clothing requirement also ensured the continuing production of Ton-

gan textiles as well as the preservation of the textile skills of weaving, felting, and dying with natural Tongan materials. She established textile cooperatives and guilds for women, which also contributed to a shift in rank as under the chiefly system, women made mats and barkcloth for chiefs and not for their own uses or collections (Herda 1999; James 1988; Small 1995). Since the majority of chiefs were stripped of their rank and authority in 1862 and effectively demoted to commoner status, they likely brought their chiefly practices of elaborate funerals, weddings, and feasts with them in their new lives as commoners (Gailey 1987). The additional promotion of weaving and barkcloth-making allowed for commoner families to amass their own collections of textiles, without the obligation to make them for chiefly women's collections and use. These elements taken together contribute to the rank promotion of commoners as a class; it is not as though rank is erased, but rather that everyone has shifted up.

The 1940s in Tonga saw a great boom in business and an increase in cash flow from the British and American troops stationed in the islands during WWII. Tongans began to prosper from this influence with some business owners achieving great financial success. The 1960s brought Tongans abroad for the beginning of a major migration of out the islands that has continued to the present (Wood-Ellem 2001). As in the 1960s, people leave Tonga still today for two main purposes: work and education. This migration had a huge bearing on the social makeup in Tonga because of the increased access to cash—through one's own earning or remitted money from relatives—and higher education, which is highly valued in Tonga. I have heard from multiple people that Tonga has the most PhDs per capita in the world. Regardless of the “truth” of that statement, it shows

how much people in Tonga respect and admire educational achievements.

As commoners shifted up, some of them became wealthy and some of them attained high educational degrees. The traditions associated with chiefly families were adopted and practiced amongst commoners, either because the majority of chiefs were demoted to commoner status and brought their traditions along, because of the encouragement by Queen Salote that commoners carry on Tongan culture, or as a form of status competition and conspicuous consumption (Besnier 2009). Some of the high status traditions that were adopted and perpetuated by commoners were having textile collections for use in textile gift exchange or to wear as *ta'ovala*, hosting large funerals for one's family, and hosting feasts and celebrations (James 1997). The influx of cash allowed for a dramatic increase in the extravagance of these events (Ibid). Commoners created a new system of stratification that relied heavily on a combination of both old and new status symbols (Besnier 2009).

It is in this context that men were empowered to become the chiefs of their own houses—as Tevita has said “fathers are chiefs in their families”—and to claim the rights of *fatongia* (rights over the labor and products of labor) from those below them. Thus, a father can ask his children for money, or just take the money; or he can require that his children help him in the garden, cook the *'umu*, roast pigs, tend animals, cook for a funeral, or any other work needed needed. These requests are his right and should be complied with, not negotiated or declined. While this has likely been the practice of fathers in Tonga long before the emancipation of commoners from chiefs, the absence of chiefly *fatongia* rights currently brings Tevita's statement into sharper relief.



Additionally, the abolishment of the chiefly system and the land tenure structure established that provided all Tongan men with a plot of land for living and for forming, promoted the status of the family over the village (James 1997). The contrast is seen clearly when compared to contemporary Samoa, which sees community organization centering on village chiefs (Ibid). In Tonga this community organization falls to families and churches.

### **Sharing**

Not all of the kinship financial interactions are conducted by strict adherence to roles and rules, or laced with resentment; for many people there is a strong emotional component to sharing money. Even my friends who expressed irritation in the moment or in their accounts of being compelled to give money to their families, in other times, mentioned how much they would like to go abroad so that they can send money back and help their families, or earn money to bring back and build a house for someone. A family I stayed with during a previous trip to Tonga had adult daughters living in New Zealand who sent them all kinds of things quite often. Their mother told me about the generosity of her daughters and how they do “too much.” While I was there she was preparing a shipping barrel of root crops, peeling everything per customs requirements, to send to her daughters.

The inclination to be generous and the emotions entailed in giving also extends outside of family relations. My neighbor Valita worked as a whale swimming guide during the whale migration season, which was also the tourist season in Vava’u. He said it

was so hard for him to have money and not give some to “his boys”—his best friends from his home village. He would see them in town and just give them money because it felt wrong to have it all to himself. And, he told me and Emily, they would do the same for him too. Sometimes the generosity I saw made me feel terrible, ashamed that I could not be similarly generous, or at least not without a lot of effort.

The loose attachment to money is very intentional in Tonga. Ministers preach about it by imploring people to “not make money your god,”—a warning that has become so ingrained that I have heard it repeated many times in a variety of contexts, sometimes with the additional “like *palangis* do.”

Finally I asked one of my friends “what do you mean? I have heard this so many times, how do you make money your god?”

She said “you know, thinking about it all the time, chasing it, doing anything to have money, and forgetting about your family.” That sounded familiar, I thought.

I also saw children being taught not to be possessive of anything, to not really feel ownership over objects, and to be able to share and give away anything, at any point. One time during Mass I was sitting with Talia, Kolina, and Talia’s children. Her youngest daughter was under two and sat on Talia’s lap eating cookies while Kolina and Talia took turns silently asking her for a cookie. They did this by opening their hands, palm up, in front of her. She clutched her cookies tighter, they laughed, and would take the cookies out of her hands, which made the little girl mad. Talia and Kolina kept laughing quietly about it, then Talia whispered to me that her baby does not act Tongan at all. “Look how mad she gets!” she said to me. The game did not go on for long before Talia’s husband

shot her an irritated look, presumably because we were all being kind of noisy in church, and then she stopped.

Talia expanded on this theory to me at other times, that her youngest daughter was so strange and did not act like her other daughters, and frankly, did not act very Tongan. “What do you mean? How can a baby not act Tongan?” I laughed as I asked her.

“No I’m serious Kalo,” she said, also laughing, “she doesn’t like Tongan food, I have to buy her cereal and milk to eat because she won’t eat anything else. And she can’t share anything! She gets so mad about it all, if you give her something, it’s hers.”

“Why?” I asked, thinking that she possibly seemed too young to share and also wondering if there was more to Talia’s theory, like there were other bad behaviors she associated with *palangis* and her daughter that she did not want to tell me.

“I don’t know where she gets it.”

In many instances I saw children share things almost automatically. The baby-cookie-church incident probably stood out so much because I was surprised too. Older children also acted differently towards food and I had not seen anyone directing them to be that way. It was not “Peni! Share your orange with the guest,” it was just an orange handed over to me when I walked in the door from a child who was about to eat it. If I refused it or handed it back, then the child would look to someone else for approval to actually eat it himself, as he planned to do before I suddenly appeared. School children seemed to pack their lunches and snacks with every intention to divide it up and share with their friends.

I mostly saw this automatic sharing and giving with regard to food, but also with

other things, such as clothing and jewelry. During one of my stays in a guest house I became friends with a girl who worked there; and I did what I normally do to ingratiate myself with another woman my age: I complimented her. However, it seemed to backfire a little bit and had unintended consequences. I told her she had pretty earrings and the next day she gave them to me. When I tried to refuse she said she had many just like them. I told her I liked her blouses and then she said she *would* give them to me, but they were a gift from her cousin, so she should keep them. I was embarrassed; I did not want her to give me her clothes or her jewelry or anything, and I wondered if she thought I was asking for them by telling her she looked nice.

I encountered countless examples of food sharing. “Come eat” is basically a greeting that is meant simultaneously figuratively and literally. One could take it to mean “come over and chat,” or someone could go visit and expect to eat something. When I lived alone, my friends forced me to learn to share my food by just taking it, they would come over and eat everything I had. They also brought me food when they had something to share. It was so different and so consistent, that the lack of food sharing was one of the first things that I noticed when I came home, and it really bothered me. I sat in the airport in New Zealand and was irritated that the stranger sitting next to me did not offer me some of the chips she was eating. It irritated me to cook for myself and know that unless I invited someone, no one would stop by and eat anything. Home was isolating; it was such a contrast to bustling Tonga where it felt like I had a bunch of siblings (for good and bad) because everyone was in my space, taking my things, and eating my food in ways I was only used to my family doing.

### Money Morality; Networks Wide and Narrow

It has been demonstrated by many anthropologists that the introduction of money to non-capitalist places does not destroy indigenous economic systems or replace gift economies (Parry and Bloch 1989). While gift exchange is not destroyed by money, it is impacted by it in some ways as cash is often needed to buy gifts, and it can itself be a gift (Addo 2009; LiPuma 1999). Indeed, every type of reciprocal giving is present and common in Tonga: direct, indirect, general and are practiced in settings that range in formality (Sahlins 1972). Others have noted that possibly nothing in Tonga is strictly a gift or a commodity as quintessential gifts, like textiles, oscillate between categories, while the object emblematic of commodity exchange, cash, is often part of the aesthetic package of formal gifts (Addo 2009; Addo and Besnier 2008; Evans 2003). Apart from formal gift exchange, the generalized reciprocity of daily, normal, automatic sharing is another realm in which money acts like a gift. It is taken as nonchalantly as food; it is asked for and expected as though it does not closely “belong” to any individual, but rather the family. It is shared as automatically as a piece of fruit.

Conceptually and categorically, the way people relate to and use money is very close to food. Kaeppler divides Tongan gifts into two categories: 1. *ngaue*, which means work, and includes all the products of work done by men, namely food as it is grown or raised by men; and 2. *koloa*, which means wealth, and includes the products that belong to and are made by women, namely textiles (1999). *Koloa* textiles are both gifts and heirlooms that can be kept within lineages, and vested with their identities for generations, as well as exchanged (Henare 2005; Herda 1999; Kaeppler 1999; Weiner 1992). Food, as it

is literally consumable, cannot be passed down through generations and should not be hoarded. Even if one wants to display one's wealth with food, it is done through elaborately sharing it (Evans 2003; Sahlins 1972).

In many ways money fits neatly into the category of "work" as it is not itself an object of art or skill, but the consumable product of someone's labor. On its own, without being invested in some capacity, cash does not gain value over time the way heirloom textiles can. There is the pervasive feeling towards money that "if you have it, you have enough to share," just like food and that keeping it to oneself is not right. I have heard countless complaints about stingy and greedy people, who are known to have money but who withhold it from family events like funerals. My Mormon informants seem highly aware of the possibility or reality that their relatives think they are being greedy. Tongans who live overseas (and thus are presumably wealthy) who do not give enough are a point of resentment and irritation for many of my informants.

Food and money additionally reside in the same category because money is so often used to purchase food, with people increasingly working in non-agricultural jobs, which often prevents them from growing and raising their own food. Further underscoring the categorical similarity between food and money is an example from a funeral in Tongatapu that someone told me about. The family of the deceased mostly lived overseas, but they came back to Tonga to have the funeral. For reasons unknown to me, the family did not want to or could not acquire, cook, and prepare all of the expected food for the funeral, so instead of food they handed everyone who came a fifty-dollar bill.

Despite the categorical similarities, a lot of cultural work has to be done to keep

money conceptually in that position, and not everyone agrees that money should be seen as a freely-shared consumable. The oft-repeated, religiously-toned warning to “not make money your god,” highlights that there is something about money that *is* different from other things that are so easy to share. No one has to be warned by ministers or reminded by common platitudes not to be greedy and obsessive about food. Mormons in Tonga actively combat this mentality by assuring people that money is different. They teach that it is not necessary, or even healthy, to share money with others as a way of forming and maintaining relationships (Ashton 1975). And likewise the young people with jobs who are obligated to share “their” money with their families are also often frustrated with the obligation to share it.

Sharing money and sharing food seem so quintessentially Tongan—as if they are both fully emblematic of “the Tongan way.” These are actions that demonstrate adherence to the formal kinship of ranked relationships and the associated roles, duties, and rules; and the same generalized reciprocity of sharing underscores the relationships of the informal kinship networks of friends who are like family. Both are expansive, wide, and rooted in actions that flow outward from the individual.

Some people, like Mormons in particular (and frustrated people at the bottom of *kainga* rank systems), are attempting to consider money differently in a way more aligned to “the *palangi* way.” For these people money is something that should be kept close to the individual who has earned it and kept apart from the configuration of kinship networks. In this case, despite the size of one’s network, the actions towards money are “narrow,” with planned, measured generosity and the bulk of one’s earnings kept close.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I am trying to underscore the factors that lead to a money morality whereby people ought to have a loose attachment to money, an ability to give it out freely and generously when asked, and to be careful not to fall into “*palangi*” style patterns of obsessing over earning it and keeping it to oneself. This is “the Tongan way” to approach money and it is informed explicitly by Methodist ministers, and implicitly through Tongan kin structures and prevailing attitudes towards food, which I argue is categorically similar to money.

The requests for money from fathers and the sections on *kainga* rank and *fatongia* highlight how the rights of family members has only increased since the Constitutional Era began and commoners were emancipated from chiefly burdens. Likewise, these requests —particularly as they occur within a traditional kinship framework— influence attitudes towards money and emphasize the connection between tradition, Tongan values, and the ability to give money away.

The section on sharing shows many observed instances of children and adults sharing, without hesitation, their possessions and their food. This relationship to things is taught from infancy and additionally contributes to the possibility of people having an understanding of money whereby strict ownership is not felt over it.

This chapter also illustrates how closely conceptions of money and family are intertwined. For someone to refuse a request of money from relatives “above” him or her is not just demonstrating a different approach to money, it is demonstrating a different approach to family. Not only would such an action be disobedient and disrespectful, but it is



possibly revealing that the person cares more about himself or herself than the family, that Tongan values are being lost, and that he or she is succumbing to greed—which is closely aligned with “*palangi*” attitudes towards money.

It is in this environment that Mormons in Tonga work hard to put forth a money morality based on responsibility, the wisdom of (the right kind of) Christianity, and one that does not promote disobedience, disrespect, or forgetting about family, but rather reckons family—and patterns of authority within it—slightly differently. Mormons also seek to demonstrate love, respect, and obedience in ways that are separate from money.

## Chapter 7

### Funerals and Weaving

In this final chapter I will explore how the conflicting views of contemporary Tongan culture—“the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way”—are manifesting in two related spheres: that of funerals and weaving. Funerals and weaving are so closely related because funerals are one of the most Tongan-textile-centric events as textiles are used to wrap people as *ta’ovala*, and they are used as formal gifts and decorations (Veys 2009). Funerals are also one of the most expensive (and unavoidable) events in Tonga and they are changing across religious groups as people are opting to reduce expenses in a variety of ways (Addo 2009). Of course informants noted that ultimately the decision is “up to the family” on how to celebrate their deceased relatives, but many suggest that a good place to start changing is to reduce gift obligations from textiles to “just flowers.” It is notable that many Tongan Mormons are resolute in their opinions that funerals should not be extravagant; likewise Mormons are perceived by others as “free to do what they want” with funerals. In contrast to funerals in the US where the bulk of funerary expenses come from taking care of the corpse (embalming, cremation, burial plots, etc.), in Tonga those aspects of death cost very little. Rather it is the obligations to provide food at multiple funeral events and to use textiles (as *ta’ovala*, gifts, and decorations) that are what make Tongan funerals so expensive and resource-heavy (McGrath 1993). Networks are utilized

to spread the costs and work in a similar way to how they are used during the Wesleyan Conference, however, with funerals the burdens fall more clearly on “the family” rather than “friends who are like family.”

### **Big, Wrapped Funerals**

The first funeral I attended in Tonga was a big one by local standards. It was for a prominent business owner from a well-known and large Catholic family, the Kaveas. The man had many children and grandchildren and was related to the family I lived with through his wife, who was 'Ofa's *mehekitanga* (her father's sister). Although there were heavy obligations from our household due to this connection—paying for and preparing food on multiple days, as well as giving textiles—there would have been more had 'Ofa's aunt died rather than her aunt's husband. As such, the greatest burdens fell upon the deceased man's own children, who were the lowest ranked people at the funeral in relation to him (also known as the *liongi*) and were marked by the huge *ta'ovala* they had to wear because of this position (McGrath 1993; Veys 2009).

Funerals are, like the Wesleyan Conference, very wrapped events. The types of *ta'ovala* worn are quite different though: rather than bright colors or shiny white *ta'ovala* and *kiekie*, mourners wore darker colored *ta'ovala* that were often rougher in texture. Some of these were naturally darker due to the type of pandanus leaf<sup>11</sup> used in weaving,

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<sup>11</sup> Many mourning *ta'ovala* are made from *pa'ongo*, which is thick, dark, and durable enough to also use for floor covering mats.

and others were darkened through dying or smoking.<sup>12</sup> Mourning *ta'ovala* are always worn on top of all black outfits for men and women. The *liongi* also must wear darker and rougher mats, but theirs are much larger and wrapped their bodies from their heads to their ankles, rather than waist to thigh (see Photo 7.1). When I asked informants about why the *liongi*—both male and female—had to wear these giant *ta'ovala*, people told me that it was out of respect for the person who had died and so that everyone knows who they are in relation to the deceased.

In the opposite position to the *liongi* was the *fahu* (highest in rank in relation to the deceased). The *fahu* is chosen from the father's sister's line; it is again “up to the family” on how to choose the *fahu* and how many generations back to recognize the father's sister's line (McGrath 1993). In addition to her role regarding the gifts (detailed below), she is also accorded privileges of sitting inside the house during the funeral, while the maternal *kainga* must sit outside. Additionally, although the *fahu* is an adult woman, different children from her line represent her and sit on a small stack of Tongan textiles closest to the deceased person's head at every funeral occasion where the corpse is present.

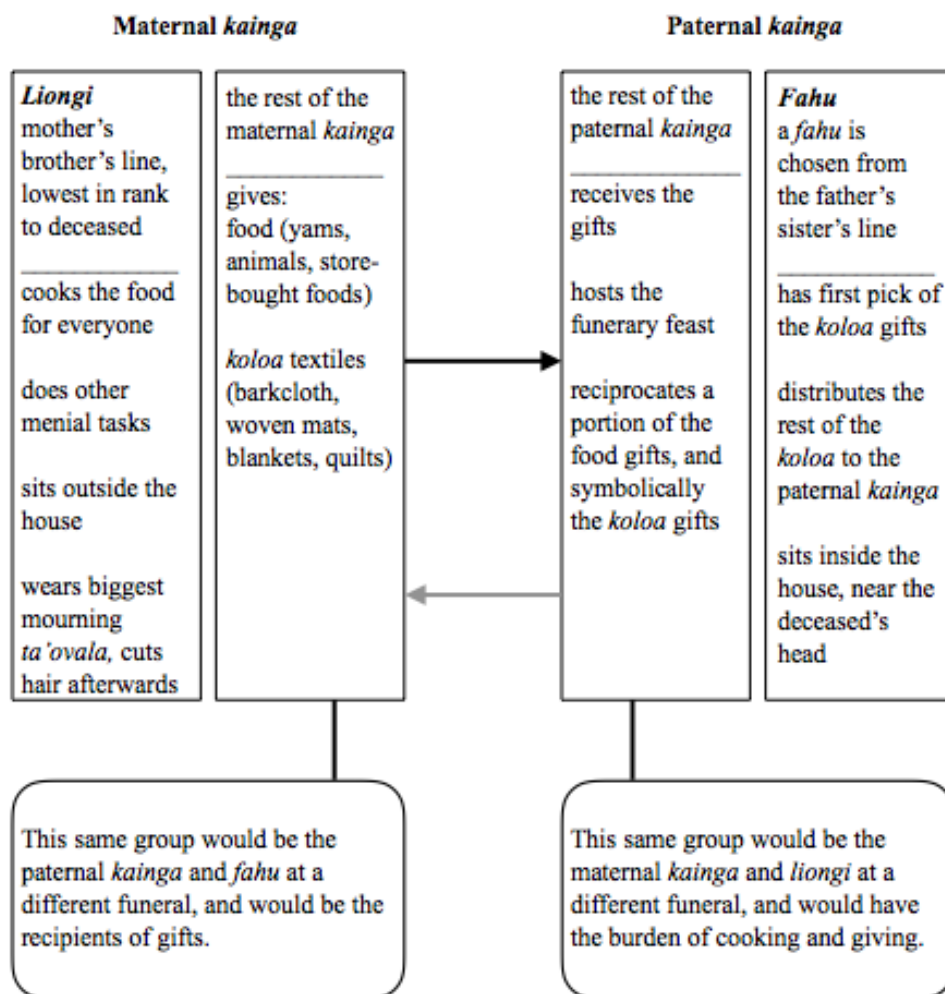
Exchange at a funeral is based on the same principles that govern Tongan kinship in that sisters outrank brothers, and elder outranks young. This fundamental ranked relationship also determines the rule that Ego can ask his mother's brother for any type of

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<sup>12</sup> Sometimes if *kie* leaves, which are bright white when treated, are damaged (by rain water for example), they will still be used to make *ta'ovala* with the intention of darkening it through dye or smoke for use as a funeral *ta'ovala*. In this case the *ta'ovala* will be woven first with the damaged leaves and colored afterwards.

help or material resource and can expect to receive it. At the same time, he is expected to give generously to his father's sister (and his own sisters and their children). This pattern of giving occurs at life cycle events and creates a system of asymmetric, generalized exchange. During a funeral, rather than the mother's brother giving to Ego and Ego giving to his father's sister, the mother's *kainga* gives (on behalf of deceased Ego) to the father's *kainga*, with the father's sister receiving the best gifts and the mother's brother making the greatest sacrifices.

### Tongan Funeral Kinship and Exchange



If the deceased person is a father (in the case of the Kavea funeral), then his children are the *liongi* (lowest in rank in relation to him), but if he is not a father or the deceased person is a women, then the mother's brother's line serves as *liongi*. The maternal *kainga* are responsible for giving gifts of food and textiles to the paternal *kainga*. The *liongi* must cook the food and perform other menial tasks required for the funeral. The paternal *kainga* receive the gifts, with the *fahu* choosing the best items for herself and her line of kin and distributing the rest of the collected textiles gifts to the rest of the paternal *kainga*. The gifts of food (yams, animals, and store-bought items like buns, Fanta, eggs, chicken) are used to feed people who attend the funeral, but some food is held back to reciprocate to the givers. The textile gifts are symbolically reciprocated in that typically the reciprocated textiles are returned to the family so that the paternal *kainga* gains. Sometimes they are actually reciprocated with different textiles that are kept.

This system of asymmetric exchange works because it is predicated on the assumption that everyone will at times be on the giving (maternal) side and at other times be on the receiving (paternal) side. As indicated in the chart, this system of asymmetric, generalized exchange almost works as a chain of exchange rather than a loop linking the same people. Being in the paternal *kainga* for a funeral is a good opportunity for a woman to increase her textile collection, which will be needed when she is in the maternal *kainga* of a different funeral and must give extensively. There are other groups of people who give at a funeral as well—like one's *kainga lotu* and the *kainga* of spouses and in-laws. Taking the same sister-brother kernel into consideration, it is evident what people will be giving and doing. For example, the household where I lived was connected

as the brother of the widow, due to that relationships the obligations of giving were large.

The Kavea funeral lasted for days and there were many more elements to it than I expected. The house where I lived was also buzzing with work for the funeral. 'Ofa sewed new black satin outfits for some of her aunt's children and grandchildren that they wore to the funeral Mass, and no doubt many times after, since the immediate family and their children had to wear black for a full year following the death. Tevita killed and roasted pigs for the funeral, in addition to organizing choir music and choir practices all week for the funeral Mass. It seemed that the adults rotated attending the *failotu* each night (so that the household was represented); *failotu* was a special prayer service at the morgue held every evening from the day Lopeti Kavea died until he was buried—food accompanied this and every element of the funeral. There were nights when it seemed like our house had purchased the *failotu* buns and soda because trays of each were waiting in the kitchen and passed out by Tevita and 'Ofa after the service. One day 'Ofa and her mother were busing baking ten cakes to take over to the Kavea house. No doubt other closely related families were helping prepare the food for the funeral “tea”—fried chicken, hotdogs, hard boiled eggs, and a starch vegetable all packaged in individual plastic bags for every funeral guest. Our household likely also contributed to the bags of raw meat everyone received after the burial as well. Food, as mentioned, is a major expense at funerals. The second is textiles, less as *ta'ovala* and more as gifts and decoration.

The gift giving happened at different intervals as well, with different groups of women bringing textiles to the mourning household throughout the week. The Kavea house was next door to the one where I lived with the family, so it was unavoidable to see

and hear what was happening all week. Before 'Ofa and her mother gave the textiles, the gift-mats had to be picked out. Huge stacks of mats were unfolded and laid out on the couches in the living room for examination and choosing. 'Ofa and her mother Lu'isa chose two large lightly colored mats with bright yarn decorations, a long piece of silky floral fabric, and a large piece of barkcloth painted with Tongan designs (*kupesi*). 'Ofa and Lu'isa went to give these textiles with women from the church, who all lined up and walked their own gifts over to the Kavea house. Each woman was holding two textiles in her arms: a mat and a handmade blanket, or a mat with a piece of barkcloth, or a mat and a length of fabric long enough to be used to make a dress. I noticed other women presenting gifts of cloth to the new widow as well on other days, with the same format of lining up and presenting these gifts.

I did not go with them to present the gifts because it did not seem right to me. Later in fieldwork, however, I went for this part of a (different) funeral and there were so many gifts to be given that someone handed me stack of mats to present as well. The presentation of so many women lining up and laying textiles down, one after another, in front of a bereaved woman sitting with her family was really moving. It felt like a gesture so full of love, care, and support. I realized during this gift presentation as well how much of female sphere textiles truly are from the production (detailed later) to the collection to the gifts. As we were giving these mats, barkcloth, blankets, and fabric to the widow, the men in the family were in a completely different area drinking kava.

In addition to the textiles used as *ta'ovala*, and as gifts, huge mats are needed for protective decoration and to wrap the corpse during the funeral (Veys 2009). While the



mats used as mourning *ta'ovala* are rough and dark, the mats given as gifts and used to wrap the corpse and decorate or protect areas during the funeral are all bright, lightly colored, and shiny (see Photo 7.1). When Lopeti Kavea's body was returned to his house for the night before the funeral Mass, the van that brought it was covered in mats inside and out. Any time the body was transported, the van that took it was decorated like this. At another funeral I attended on an outer island, the body was carried from the home to the church by people, and the whole time a huge mat was carried over the body. The corpse itself, rather than using a casket, is wrapped in layers of textiles: barkcloth, a woven mat, and often a decorative white cloth. At the Kavea funeral Mass the body was also laid on top of a stack of mats and barkcloth. Special people as well sit on top of a stack of mats and barkcloth like the the *fahu* and the queen mother, who also attended this funeral.

At the burial the layer of decorative white fabric and the mats wrapping the corpse are removed and the body is buried wrapped in barkcloth in a family grave. Bodies are buried with sand, rather than soil, because it “feels nice and cool” for the person who has died and it keeps the bones white. Soil makes the bones look dark and “burned.” This is important, and known, because people are buried in family graves with the remains of their relatives<sup>13</sup> in the same place. When a grave is prepared for a new body to be added, it is opened and the last person's remains—which should be just bones, as there is a minimum waiting period of ten years before a grave is used again—are removed, cleaned,

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<sup>13</sup> I was told that it did not matter which relatives a person was buried with, but graves were chosen based on which one was “ready.” However, during a family reunion when several new headstones were purchased and erected, one grave contained all the children who had died in the family, spanning the past century. It is possible that there are other grave “themes” like this one.

wrapped in a piece of barkcloth, and placed back in the grave. Wrapping is also symbolic of being in the womb—in other words, one is wrapped in every stage of life and death (Tcherkézoff 2002).

### **Funerals Scaled Down**

Although the Kavea funeral was larger than most, it was not uncommon in its format. I attended many other funerals that had formal textile gifts, honored a *fahu*, lasted multiple days, and where the expected cooked and raw foods were given out to funeral guests. As with other resource-heavy events, there was a significant amount of complaining, suggestions for change in the future, and actual examples of ways other families had managed to host smaller funerals. An increasingly common (and seemingly simple) change that anthropologist Ping-Ann Addo has written about as well, is families asking for no textile gifts, only cash. In the example of this that Addo writes about, it is in the event of an unexpected death, and the funeral took place overseas in New Zealand (2009). Both of those factors would possibly make textile gift exchange additionally very expensive, especially if the family had not built up a collection of mats for reciprocating the gifts. The funeral I had heard about in Tongatapu where the family did not have time (presumably) to cook, but passed out fifty dollar bills to all the funeral guests in lieu of food, was less about reducing costs as it was about simplifying the labor-intensive format of traditional funerals. Nevertheless, in both areas—of cost and work—many people are eager to embrace changes that ease the burdens. Two Mormon informants of mine were the most resolute and clear in expressing their opinions that funerals need to change.

*Viliami*

Viliami was a Mormon man—he was raised in the church and his immediate family of origin was all Mormon—and he was married with four small children. When I talked to him he was in the process of opening a clothing store in Vava'u as a side business, in addition to the construction work he did in Australia for part of the year. He had built a large house for himself and his family in his home village on the Western side of the island where I talked to him one weekend while visiting a friend from the Peace Corps. I asked him what he thought of Tongan traditions, like funerals for example.

“They don’t make sense” he told me. “Everyone spends so much money and gives so many animals, they throw this big party for you but you can’t even enjoy it because you’re already gone! You’re dead!” Viliami laughed. “My mother is getting old and I’ve already talked to her about it and she agrees with me. I asked her, I said ‘I have this amount of money to spend on you, do you want me to save it for your funeral or spend it on you now when you are living and can enjoy it?’ She said she’d rather use it now. She lives with my family, she has everything she wants and sometimes I buy her plane tickets to go visit my siblings in America.”

“And when she dies will you have any kind of a funeral?” I asked.

“We will have something small and just for the family. There is no need to do a big thing for everyone and to do all the food for the whole village. You know a lot of people just come to funerals for the food, even if they didn’t know the person. It’s too much. It’s a waste of money... and she agreed to this, this is what my mother wants.”

His complaint about people just attending a funeral for the food was one I had

heard before. During the Kavea funeral, Kolina told me that she was sure many of the people who came to the burial—where bags of raw meat are passed out—had only come to get the food afterwards. She sort of laughed and rolled her eyes and told me this was “typical Tonga.”

“What about the rest of your family?” I asked. “Does everyone agree to this?”

“Oh no...” Viliami sighed and then laughed again “my mother is from the other side of Vava’u,” he gestured across the water. “My relatives on that side talk badly about me because I’m Mormon and they don’t like it. But it isn’t up to them what to do for her funeral and I know I am making wise decisions.”

### *Saiosi*

Saiosi was also a married Mormon man, father of two young daughters, and he worked as a teacher. Unlike Viliami, Saiosi had converted fairly recently to the LDS Church from the Wesleyan Church, where his father was a minister and the rest of his family still belonged. I asked Saiosi as well what he thought of Tongan funerals.

“I think people spend too much money on the funerals. It’s not a responsible way to spend money, but they do it anyway.”

“Can people have funerals differently?” I asked.

“Oh yes, there are many things people can do. Some families are asking for just flowers, you know.” I asked him what he meant by that and Saiosi continued: “people ask for flowers instead of mats and barkcloth, it is traditional at Tongan funerals for everyone to give many mats to the family. But it’s a lot of work because you have to sort them out

and give ones in return and things like that, so people ask for the flowers instead, to cut down on costs and work. Still Tongans feel like they have to feed everyone! Have you been to a funeral yet?”

“Yes,” I told him “there is a lot of food!”

“Mm,” he nodded “it’s the Tongan way!” Saiosi smiled and continued, “But it’s too much and I have not seen that change. It costs a lot of money for the family, especially if they do not have time to work in the bush and raise their own animals, then they have buy them. One cow costs a thousand dollars!” I thought about all the meat passed out at burials, and the foods given during funeral tea, and all the times when people were being fed. I wondered how many animals were used, so I asked Saiosi.

“It depends on how big the funeral is, how big the family is, how rich the family is. Maybe just one cow for a small funeral, five or six for a big one. It’s not just cows either, it’s also pigs, chickens, truckloads of yams. And what’s the point?”

I shrugged and laughed “I don’t know!” I hoped that my lack of an answer would prompt him to continue. It didn’t, so I asked him “Is that what funerals are like in your family? Is this what you would do for your parents?”

“It’s not up to me. When my parents die, my older brothers will decide how to have the funerals and if they ask me for cows and pigs, then I have to give them.”

“If you could decide what to do for funerals, what would you do?”

He thought for a few moments and said “if my daughter died, I would have a very simple funeral for her. Anyone could come, but the food would just be cookies and lemonade. I think that’s enough for a funeral.”

Neither man I interviewed mentioned too much about Tongan textiles being a large expense at funerals, but as that is the realm of women's work, it is not surprising that they did not speak very much to it. Food is the categorical equivalent for men (as textiles are to women), so both Viliami and Saiosi were more aware of the cost, work, and expectations of providing food. It is interesting that foregoing textile gifts is one of the first ways in which people scale back their funeral expenses. But, as noted in the first section, the gifts are only one of three ways in which Tongan textiles are prominently used in funerals. Nevertheless, if "scaling back" is on so many people's minds, it could be possible that the position of textiles is more precarious than expected.

### **Mahina's Four Mats**

Mahina was my weaving teacher during fieldwork. I worked with her for nearly a year and half learning how to weave different kinds of mats out of processed pandanus leaves, and for a full year of that time she was working on one order she had from Mele, a Tongan woman living in Australia, who was given Mahina's name through some friends. Mele ordered 4, 20-foot long mats out of *kie* leaves and would pay Mahina 20,000 Tongan *pa'anga* when they were done (which is about USD 10,000). *Kie* leaves are a type of pandanus that, when treated in seawater and sunlight, becomes very bright, shiny, and almost white in color (see Photos 7.2 and 7.3). These leaves take extra processing time than other types of pandanus and the final effect is an almost glittering mat (see Photos 2.4 and 7.1). Mahina told me that Mele probably wanted them for funerals, as women seriously start to build up their collections in their 40s and 50s in preparation for

their parents' deaths and the funeral obligations that accompany the death of a parent.

About half of the eight women in our weaving group were making mats for their own collections and the other half had various orders, like Mahina's, for friends or relatives either locally or overseas to purchase.

A collection of textiles could range broadly and include other items, like bark-cloth, and handmade quilts or blankets. There was a huge stack of textiles at the house where I stayed, and I have seen others at informants homes as well with twenty or more pieces. Sometimes they are folded under mattresses to keep them safe and flat. These mats are treasures that are collected to be used in gift exchange or kept in families for generations.

A twenty-foot long mat like the ones Mahina was making would be used most likely to wrap a corpse, to cover a casket, or to serve as some other protective decoration during the funeral (Veys 2009). Women need to build up their collections in middle age for not just their parents' future funerals, but a wide variety of funeral obligations that will arise. Although, no doubt, you need the most for your parents because friends, relatives, and people in the church family will bring textile gifts to the family during the funeral, which must be reciprocated after the funeral with equally valued, but ideally not the same, mats.

An order like Mahina's would take about a year to complete. Weavers in a group have a daily goal of twelve square feet per person. On my best days of weaving I could do six feet before I had to stop from pain and exhaustion. Since a mat the size of Mahina's would be about 240 square feet, it would take one person four weeks—or twenty

days—to finish weaving one twenty-by-twelve-foot mat. But working in a group means that the weaving is rotated among group members.

Mahina and the other weavers in the group were teaching me how to weave; and in the beginning I was trying to piece together who everyone was, how the group functioned, and how to actually weave (see Photos 7.4 and 7.5). I tried to pay attention to the different mats that came into the open, airy church hall every day where we sat to weave in order to figure out whose “day” it was in the rotation. I tried to match people to their mats-in-progress, sometimes I would ask whose day it was, but early on I did not know everyone’s names so precisely, and what made it additionally confusing is that the weaver does not actually have to be present on “her” day, the whole group will work on her mats and she can use that day to run errands or do housework. One person would answer my question and tell me: “oh it’s Nika’s day,” and I would try to subtly look around to see if I remembered who Nika was and then convince myself that I really did not know anyone’s name because the person I thought was Nika was not even there. Eventually I pieced it all together and I could usually quickly tell whose day it was, not by the mats we were working on, but by who was absent, which would be further confirmed if I saw the woman drop off lunch for everyone. That was the arrangement in the weaving group: you trade weaving time by weaving twelve square feet a day for Nika, Ola, Tahi, and Malia; and on your day they all weave twelve square feet on your mats. Technically, you do not even have to weave any of your own mat in this arrangement, although it seemed that most people in my group did work on their own mats, but usually during the weaving group breaks. This arrangement mimics a pre-Constitutional Era system wherein chiefly



women's textiles were made by women lower in rank than them (Herda 1999; James 1988; Small 1995).

Because I was Mahina's little shadow, I knew her mats and I knew about this big order for a lot of money and how lucky she was to have such an arrangement. My first encounter with the mats was when they were freshly processed leaves. Before I saw the leaves, they were green and came in big bunches on the boat from Mahina's husband's home village on another island. Then Mahina and her husband cut them and left them to soak in the sea for a few weeks until they turned white. The leaves were then brought to dry in the sun where they curled up like ribbons on a birthday present. One day during a school holiday, Mahina, her two sons, and I sat in her house surrounded by voluminous bunches of curly white papery leaves and methodically straightened each leaf with the straight side of a tin can lid folded in half and rolled the leaves into wheels for storage until they were needed.

Mahina started the mats at home and when they appeared in the hall for the group they were twelve feet wide and two feet long. She brought the wheels of leaves and would unwrap them to cut each leaf into evenly sized strips, also with a specially made tool. Each weaver had a little bunch of these cut leaves that were comfortably held between their first two toes for easy access while working. Every few weeks on Mahina's weaving day I noticed the mats looking bigger and bigger and after a while the woven, finished part would have to be rolled or folded behind the weavers. Then the roll of finished mat grew fatter and bigger. Finally the mats were done and it was time to trim the leaf pieces sticking out from where new leaf strips were added during weaving. Then the

mats were gone and Mahina had started new projects. I asked her where they were, somewhat frantically, because I really wanted a picture of at least one of these mats and I was worried that they had already been shipped to Australia. She said they were at home, she laughed and said “they’re done but they’re not done.”

Later I helped Mahina “sew” some designs, inspired by some we saw at the Royal Agricultural Show, onto the tops of the mats with strips of black plastic ribbon. This was done with a specially made flat needle so that the ribbon is actually woven on top of the woven mat to make a design that is mapped out with little pen dots on that mat. I asked her when she would send them to Australia, she said maybe in November because she knew some people going and they could take the mats, then she could also have money for Christmas. They seemed almost ready in September, so it was plausible. I just continued weaving with her, sometimes at her house and sometimes with the group.

I went home for a fieldwork break during Christmas and when I came back I saw the mats in Mahina’s house and I asked if those were the same mats that were supposed to go to Australia. She said “Yes! The lady backed out, she ran away, she stopped answering my calls.” Mahina told me how mad she was about it. I asked her what she would do next and if she knew anyone else who might buy them. She told me she was going to try to see if anyone in Tongatapu, the main island, might buy them. I just nodded and thought about the textile pawn shops in Tongatapu I had read about and seen in passing.

Months of fieldwork went by and I asked again one day what ended up happening to the mats, did they sell in Tongatapu? She said “no” and added that her mom was asking around in her village if anyone needed any of these big funeral mats. She was clearly

disappointed. “Maybe someone will, but it won’t be as much money.” I asked why, and she said “Because it’s Vava’u.” Her comment made me think of my landlady, who, despite her cashflow, told me she would *never* buy a mat. I was so stunned by that comment that I asked her why. She replied that everyone knows how to weave in Vava’u and everyone knows how easy it is and if she needed one she would just ask a relative to make her one. Two of the mats sold for 2,000 *pa’anga* (or about USD 1,000) to a woman from Mahina’s mother’s village. The other two were kept and absorbed into the family collection, to be used in a funeral when they were needed.

There are characteristics in the object itself and in its construction that contribute to how it is valued: primarily the size of the mat and the type of leaves used. Quality is a factor perhaps in a weaver’s reputation or a buyer’s satisfaction, but generally that cannot be fully guaranteed, especially since many weavers work in a group. Weavers talk about the time it takes to make such a mat and all the work that goes in to it as contributing to the value, as well as how badly overseas Tongans want and need these textiles. The women in my group assured me that Tongans in New Zealand, Australia, and the US need mats for funerals but they do not have the time or materials to make them themselves. However, these overseas Tongans do have the money to buy mats, or so my informants believed. This assurance almost exactly echoed what James has written about regarding the textile demands from overseas Tongans, that they are desired and needed for people to demonstrate their commitment to Tongan traditions and national identity, and they are important status symbols in the diasporic communities (1997).

Locally the price of mats (as very low or with no money transacted at all) is de-

terminated by the assurance that everyone has access to the skills of weavers. Likewise, weavers know that no one in Tonga has money to pay the same prices that Tongans abroad can pay. The history of these objects being traditional wealth, gifts, and heirlooms, no doubt contributes to people's hesitation to merely purchase them. In their study of textile pawn shops in Tongatapu, Addo and Besnier investigated how these objects oscillate between the categories of gift and commodity, never fully residing as one thing or the other (2008). Additionally, they revealed an immense amount of shame attributed to both pawning and purchasing pawned textiles in Tongatapu (Ibid). I think this shame is also why there seemed to be a short shelf-life to Mahina's mats as commodities. They could not stay indefinitely "for sale" because that would indicate that the seller was shamefully desperate for cash, as if her family did not have enough or did not support her. It possibly also implied that her own family had no need for them, as if they did not intend on having proper, large funerals. Mahina did not tell me why Mele backed out of the purchase, whether or not she knew the reason herself. Anything could have happened, and it is possible that Mele was getting pressured by her own Australia-based family to not "waste so much money" on something like mats for funerals.

## **Conclusion**

This last chapter covers funerals and weaving because changes in funerals affect weaving and funerals seem to be the Tongan event for which changes are on the horizon. Although many people celebrated their deceased loved ones with grand, traditional funerals, many others vocalized a need to change this particular event, and still others have

enacted changes for “scaled back” funerals (Addo 2009). Weaving is implicated because funerals are likely the single event in Tonga that makes the greatest use of Tongan textiles as they are worn, given, and used as protective decoration all at the same time (McGrath 1993; Veys 2009). Additionally, the two types of funerals—traditionally big and scaled back—can be described as adhering to and symbolically aligning with “the Tongan way” or “the *palangi* way,” which are the two sides of a debate on how the future of Tongan culture should unfold.

The first section that considers the Kavea funeral demonstrates how large funerals in particular exemplify “the Tongan way” possibly more than any other event. Not only are bodies widened—sometimes extremely for the *liongi*—but again, as with the Wesleyan Conference, wide networks of people are needed to host such an event. The gift giving also shows how widely some people’s networks range as gifts are given and reciprocated soon after the funeral ends (Evans 2003; McGrath 1993). Gifts of food are likewise pooled from close relatives (at great effort) and then distributed out to wide network of people at the funeral “tea” and after the burial. People’s bodies are wrapped in mats at funerals, but also, notably spaces are wrapped in textiles possibly to protect from supernatural forces (Gell 1995; Veys 2009). Great care is shown to cover the corpse in many layers, to protect the ground on which it sits, and the vehicle in which it is carried. Likewise, this respect and “protection” is extended to those of high rank at funeral, indicated by being seated upon Tongan textiles (Ibid). The funerals are big, grand, wide, and people are abundantly fed and cared for, but they also reflect other aspects of “the Tongan way.” *Kainga* and lineage/chiefly rank are respected, observed, and highly important at funer-

als. This is also the main event over which a *mehekitanga*, chosen as *fahu*, exerts her power (Douaire-Marsaudon 1996; Rogers 1977). As demonstrated by the work done by the members of the household where I lived and in the quotes from Saiosi, funerals are a major occasion during which relatives exercise their rights to request work, animals, resources, and money from those lower in *kainga* rank position (Kaepler 1971).

The second section highlights (mostly hypothetical) funerals from two Mormon informants who firmly believe that funerals in Tonga need to change. Some of the changes they specifically mentioned were to reduce the overall costs and particularly to reduce the amount of food given out, as this is a major aspect of what makes funerals labor-intensive and expensive. Viliami stressed the nonsensical aspect of spending so much money on a person who has already died, and he asserted the wisdom of his decision, made with his mother's permission, that money otherwise set aside for a funeral should be spent on the person during their life. He emphasized the wisdom of the rationality of his decisions about money, which strike me as aligning very much with "the *palangi* way." Additionally, his wisdom towards funerals and money shifts money being spent from supporting a wide (and widening) network and an event which feeds many and celebrates with many, to the use of money for one person. Saiosi emphasized "responsibility" which is a word often used by those asserting a "*palangi*" attitude towards finances, particularly if they anticipate being labeled "greedy."

The weaving group and the act of weaving itself are entirely aligned with "the Tongan way" as they are making the very objects used as gifts and decorations and as clothing to wrap people and widen their bodies, as well as objects that connect people to

their ancestors and the land (Henare 2005; Weiner 1992). The materials for weaving are grown and processed in Tonga, often in meaningful family related locations as most weavers use leaves grown by relatives. The weaving group structure also mirrors a chiefly weaving structure—where a chiefly woman’s mats were woven by other women—except it is democratized through a rotating schedule (Herda 1999; James 1988; Small 1995). A woman “buys” the labor of her group members through working on everyone else’s mats every day, when the day for her mats comes everyone else must weave them, but she can leave to do whatever she wants. Theoretically a woman’s mat is not necessarily woven by her, which mirrors chiefly mat production (Ibid). The formation of these groups and the support of them is also a relic of Queen Salote’s time as she was intent on preserving Tongan culture (Wood-Ellem 2001). Most of the women in my group were working on mats for funerals, either for their own collections or to sell to others. It is clear that the current structure of these groups is heavily connected to how funerals are celebrated and practiced and it will be interesting to note how they may shift and adjust in the future.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Looking at the broader scope of this dissertation, there are several key questions it both raises and speaks to that I want to examine here. First, I will look at the symbolic categories of wide and narrow, the visions of contemporary Tongan society they express, and what these categories draw together. Second, I will discuss the meaning and analytic productivity of looking to bodies and objects as well as to the symbolic categories of wide and narrow. Third, I will address a common theme of ambivalence that runs throughout the dissertation and explore what this theme reveals. Finally, I will address three broad areas of inquiry that this dissertation particularly speaks to: ideas about decision-making and morality towards money; the meaning of othering; and the process of cultural change.

The motif of wideness and narrowness captures and encapsulates two very different ways of being in Tonga: “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way.” On one side, “the Tongan way” is represented through wideness of people’s physical and visual (dressed and decorated) bodies, but also through the events in which they participate, and how they relate to their families and their attitudes of sharing. For example, two quintessential, “traditional” Tongan events are feasts and funerals, and the wideness of these events is seen at every level. Both are broadly encompassing of people who are welcome to attend,



and they both involve feeding a large number of people. To do so, funerals and feasts both require the work, money, and resources of a huge network of people. Likewise, the events are also visually big, as food is wrapped in cellophane and stacked high at feasts, people's bodies are made physically large by sitting and eating large quantities of food, and both people and spaces are widened by wrapping in Tongan textiles. Participation in these events requires attitudes towards family that consider one's *kainga* to be full of important relationships that ought to be fostered in order to keep the *kainga* large and well-functioning. These relationships are maintained through material care, which requires an attitude of sharing and a willingness to easily part with one's money, food, and other resources.

On the other side, "the *palangi* way" of Tongan social life affects a range of cultural elements that are symbolically joined through the motif of narrowness. In this dissertation "the *palangi* way" is most closely associated with Tongan Mormons, although the influence extends beyond those religious boundaries. Narrowness is seen, like wideness discussed above, in people's bodies, the events in which they are involved, and how they configure their families and manage their money. The absence of *ta'ovala* at LDS Church services and events serves as an important way in which the silhouettes of people are narrowed. Through asking of their members for "only ten percent" of their income as an offering to the church, the LDS Church also models a way of handling one's finances that is akin to *palangi* norms. As such, according to this framework, most of one's money is *narrowly* kept for use by the individual to care for one's immediate family or personal use, rather than given out widely to maintain the connections of a large *kainga*. Thus,

the family is also narrowed. At events, for which dances are the most frequent and prominent, slender bodies and clothing are displayed, and dancing (rather than eating) is the norm, which serves to make people's physical bodies smaller.

These two visions of contemporary Tongan culture—the wide “Tongan way” and the narrow “*palangi* way”—are embodied, materialized, and enacted in ways that demonstrate the simultaneously deep and diffuse influence of culture. These embodiments and materializations show that values and cultural perspectives do not merely exist in people's minds, but in the physical world in which people live and interact. Furthermore, the dissertation demonstrates that bodies and objects are never neutral or separate from cultural influence, but are significant containers of meaning and are useful tools for thinking. The analysis and focus on bodies and objects is also useful in highlighting how people use their own bodies, dress, and the materials around them to express identity, conjure historical associations, and state their adherence to a particular way of being.

The symbolic categories of wide and narrow are highly productive analytically, as they bring into relation a wide range of domains—food, bodies, money, family, networks of people, dress, decorations, feasts, dances, funerals, weaving, and textiles—that otherwise might be considered separately. Ultimately this shows the extreme connectedness of culture, in that one element cannot be changed in isolation but the change will affect many other parts of a culture. This type of grouping through symbolism also reveals meaning in the connections. Why is dress so linked to these two visions of contemporary Tongan life? Possibly, much like Don Kulick (1992) argues about language shift in Papua New Guinea, it helps people to “act Tongan” if they are dressed in “Tongan” clothes.

Conversely, it might be easier to “act like a *palangi*” when someone is dressed like a *palangi*. This type of categorization can be productive in other areas of ethnographic research as well, particularly if anthropologists look to the physical and visual world for patterns and categories of analysis.

There is a persistent theme throughout this dissertation of people strongly supporting “traditional” Tongan practices, but nevertheless expressing concern that these traditions are “keeping Tongans poor.” There is an inverse theme of people trying to pull away from burdensome traditional events, but nevertheless getting pulled back into participation in them. Why are these things happening, beyond the simplest answer that culture is hard to change? On one side, the people who are strong supporters of and participants in “the Tongan way” but also strident complainers are Methodists and, to a lesser degree, Catholics. The main reason for their complaints stems from the immediate financial burden felt—for example, from being on the mother’s brother’s side at a funeral—and simultaneously observing others who are benefiting but not sacrificing to the same degree. In this instance the unevenness of the immediate situation is very palpable, along with the realization that events have increased in scale in recent history (Herda 1999; James 1997). Additionally, there is a sense that the financial sacrifices required of people directly hinder their potential for economic and social development.

Despite expressing irritations about them, people by and large have not abandoned the burdensome events for several reasons. For one reason, it is easier to vent frustrations than to entirely upend how people socialize with one another and maintain long-held kin relationships. Additionally, people know that although in the immediate moment

they are giving the most, they also know that they are participating in a system from which they will eventually benefit. Finally, and most importantly, people continue to participate in “traditional” Tongan events because they take great pride in them. These events demonstrate key Tongan values of generosity and respect, as well as Tongan aesthetics of abundance and wrapping. They also perpetuate extensive social relationships through the preparatory work required and in the actions of the event itself, whether gift-giving, feasting, or dressing in ways that index a person’s place in a family.

The inverse theme of people deciding to pull away from burdensome “traditions” and eventually getting pulled back into them is experienced by Mormons. They pull away for similar, but not identical, reasons as the Methodists and Catholics. These events are expensive and consume large amounts of money in celebrations; but, in addition, they do not correspond with what the LDS Church teaches its members about financial prudence. The church community helps people configure social life differently through dances, the encouragement of smaller funerals, and clear suggestions on how to manage Tongan money and social relations. Even though it is difficult, it is important for many Mormons to “scale back” Tongan events because they are trying to disentangle money from Tongan social life as much as possible. This effort to create new ways of maintaining social relationships that are not financially burdensome for people is essential for the vision of Tongan culture many Mormon informants have: one in which Tongans are financially independent, culturally empowered, and capable of economic advancement.

However, despite these options, Mormons still get pulled back in to wide, big, “traditional” Tongan events. One reason for this is that people’s networks do not fit neatly

within one church group. For example, although the Mormon man, Saiosi, intends to have modest funerals for family members, when his Methodist parents die it will be up to his Methodist older brother to decide what is needed for their funerals and Saiosi intends to follow through with any request from his older brother. Along similar lines, people get pulled back in because they owe people or may need help in the future, like Mormon informants of mine who helped their neighbors cook for the Wesleyan Conference because they knew the neighbors would help them for an upcoming retirement feast. This reciprocal neighborly relationship likely also has a much deeper history of exchanges that go far beyond these two events. Finally, in many ways it “seems right” to help with a feast, or it is good manners to show respect through giving gifts to the father’s sister; both of these are reasons why people still participate, despite either complaining or already having pulled away.

This dissertation addresses ideas about differing money moralities and why people make the decisions they do about how to use money. During fieldwork, these questions were persistently on my mind as I observed great amounts of resources dedicated to feasts and funerals, and the sacrifices in comfort that followed in the weeks afterwards when money was tight. I learned it was a common *palangi* reaction to criticize how Tongans “wastefully” spent their money on celebrations and church donations rather than using it in ways *palangis* saw as important. My Tongan informants *also* criticized how they and other Tongans spent money and it was a primary reason for complaining about Tongan traditions and not wanting to participate in them. People joked about how nothing in Tonga makes any sense and how this financial nonsense is the *true* Tongan way. Aside

from the jokes, which reveal tensions and possible areas of future change, how people spend their money is revealing of the landscape of contested cultural values in Tonga. On one side, Methodists and Catholics participate in events that are very expensive and they simultaneously take pride in these big Tongan celebrations and resent the sacrifices required of them. On the other side, Mormons scale back Tongan events, or simply do not participate in them, with the express goal of making Tongan celebrations less financially burdensome. Embedded within the practices of each side are differing approaches to the future of Tongan culture.

This dissertation demonstrates the usefulness of an us/them framework as a tool for understanding the culture that created it. Ira Bashkow argues that this type of othering emerges across cultures and is “uniquely suited to the exploration of problems that trouble people in their own society, problems which appear absent in the alternative world of the other” (2006: 241). I found this to be true in Tonga as informants readily pointed out to me behaviors and practices they considered emblematic of Tongans and of *palangis*, but interestingly, all of which were enacted by Tongans. Additionally, this contrast and categorization was helpful in revealing the precise places of difference people observed between the cultures, the elements people wanted to change, and the qualities in which they took pride. Informants framed their complaints about Tongan culture in terms of a contrast, no doubt largely because they were trying to explain them to me, a *palangi*. For example, during a break from funeral preparations I was told in a half-joke that I am lucky to be a *palangi* because I do not have to deal with all these *fakahela* (exhausting) Tongan funerals. Or when a friend complained about all the money her family takes from

her, she said: “I bet this doesn’t happen in *palangi* families.” The very act of communicating a cultural observation in terms of a contrast with another culture brings the contrast into existence and gives it life, so that *anything* not Tongan, good or bad, becomes *palangi*. From this contrast a detailed picture is drawn of how different informants think Tongan culture should change in the future; some think Tongan “traditions” should be ardently maintained, others think elements of *palangi* culture should be incorporated.

The incorporation of the other is seen in Bashkow’s work as well and in some ways part of the incorporation depends on maintaining the foreignness, as that gives it meaning and power, such as whitemen’s food that is imbued with prestige and therefore ideal for gift-giving and feasting. In other ways, whitemen’s culture—like Christianity or meetings held by clock-time—is explicitly incorporated to make up for perceived societal problems. Both of these processes of incorporation of *palangi* culture are seen in Tonga as the prestige of the foreign is important for the European stylings of the Royal Family, for example, and in other instances foreignness is incorporated explicitly to change culture. Indeed, the “traditions” lauded by Methodists and Catholics as essential elements of Tongan culture are a nineteenth century hybrid of features of both Tongan and foreign *palangi* culture. And similarly, the type of social life that Mormons in particular are enacting is another wave of hybridizing “the Tongan way” with “the *palangi* way,” in this case to solve “problems” within Tongan culture.

This dissertation gives a glimpse into the process of cultural hybridity and contributes to the idea that people are active agents in their own cultural change. Cultural change does not “happen to” people, but it is a negotiation and a process through which

people actively make decisions. People are deciding which elements of their own culture are no longer serving them, which elements are important to maintain, and what can or should be incorporated from another culture. In this dissertation, I have tried to paint a detailed and nuanced picture of this process, to observe the diversity of ideas, the ambivalence, and the lack of consensus about what life should look like in contemporary Tonga.

In light of this, it is possible that the biggest difference between the LDS Church and the Catholic and Methodist churches is the time depth in Tonga. The Catholics and Methodists had a century of a head start and therefore the “messiness” of their cultural shifts happened decades ago. In the nineteenth century the Tongans who did not want to become Christian and the chiefs who were wary of the ulterior motives of missionaries likely criticized the new Catholic and Methodist converts, or even accused them of acting like *palangis*. Currently Catholics and Methodists are seen as the exemplars of Tongan “tradition”—which itself is a European-Tongan hybridity in many ways. By contrast, the Mormon cultural shifts are felt at present and Mormons are the people who are seen as enacting something new, something undesired by some and certainly closely influenced by Western culture.

Finally, I will end with a short anecdote and a joke that show what it could mean to incorporate Western, *palangi* culture within Tongan culture. The first example shows one way to take the desirable elements of *palangi* culture and fix the problems by encompassing them within Tongan culture—which also shows another dimension of Bashkow’s ideas of incorporating the other. The anecdote relates to a common concern about Western culture for Tongans, as mentioned previously, about the pervasive problem



of children who do not have homes or families; and it captures, quite well, the ambivalence young Tongans feel about the positive and negative aspects of both “the Tongan way” and “the *palangi* way.” Since adoption is so common in Tonga, it is unheard of that a child would not be embedded within a family. One day after she returned from Australia, my friend Amanaki was talking to me about her trip and reflecting about Tonga and Australia broadly. She was telling me that she wished Tonga could be a little more like Australia because the young people are free there and can do whatever they want and no one gossips about it; everything in Tonga is so strict, she said. “But,” she continued, “I think people are lonelier in Australia because everyone is busy and the family isn’t strong.” She paused for a while and then said she could not stand to think about all the orphans and wished they could all just come to Tonga, because Tongans would bring them into their families and take care of them.

The following joke demonstrates the ambivalence of incorporating elements of Western culture—in this case those that align with foreign aid health initiatives—into Tongan culture. Mahina’s husband, Soane, was joking with us about the teachers at their son’s school one day. He noted: “Last week the teachers announced that students can only bring healthy food to school like coconut, papaya, fish, vegetables. So you send your kid to school with papayas,” then he laughed uncontrollably and continued, “but the teachers yell at your kid [for following the rules] and ask him ‘Where are the sausages? Where’s the cake? Where’s the corned beef?’ Nothing makes sense!” He added: “Do we want to be healthy? Maybe not,” he laughed.

## Appendix 1: Photos



1.1 (left) The author and her weaving teacher, Mahina, wear *pule taha* and *ta'ovala*.



2.1 (right) Miss Tu'i Vava'u pageant contestants pose in *pule taha* and *kiekie*.



2.2 A *tau'olunga* dancer dances in a costume made from barkcloth. Her backup dancers wear barkcloth and fresh leaves.





2.3 An example of barkcloth hangs framed on the wall of a family owned guesthouse in



2.4 A variety of woven mats are displayed at the Royal Agricultural Show. Included are *ta'ovala*, fine gift mats, and mats for sitting upon.





3.1 A feast table is ready for conference-goers, piled high with wrapped local and imported foods.



3.2 A large can of corned beef sits as the base of a centerpiece. It holds up a basket that is filled with expensive chocolate and fruit for feast guests to take home.





4.1 (top) Saineha High School sits far back from the road, behind a well-manicured lawn.

4.2 (bottom) This LDS Church building is located in Neiafu. LDS chapels are easy to spot, with signature uniformity in colors, signage, and steeples.





4.3 (top) The Catholic Church in Neiafu has an attached convent and an apartment for priests.  
4.4 (bottom) Nasaleti Hall is across the street from the Catholic Church. This is used for choir practices and meetings; some halls are used for weaving groups and kava clubs.





4.5 (top) The Free Church of Tonga in Neiafu has a parsonage house on the grounds.

4.6 (bottom) The parsonage house is grand and larger than most family houses in Vava'u.





5.1 A Mormon dance is held on a multi-sport court and is decorated with balloons and pennants.



5.2 Dance-goers wear *palangi* style clothes and forego *ta'ovala*.



5.3 Married couples dance to a slow song. A chapel steeple is seen in the background.





5.4 Kolina shows her traditional *tau'olunga* dancer's costume and oiled skin.

7.1 *Liongi* walk behind the corpse and carry a length of *kie* mat covering the body and shining brightly in the sunlight. They wear the biggest *ta'ovala* as a sign of their lowest status.



7.2 *Kie* leaves soak in seawater to help achieve their bright white color.





7.3 The leaves are fully immersed during high tide.



7.4 'Ola and Mahina work on a *kie* mat while 'Ola's son watches. Often multiple women work on the same mat together.



7.5 The weaving group women weave a *pa'ongo* mat together. Large mats have enough space for four or more women to weave at the same time.

## Appendix 2: Glossary of Tongan Terms

- ao** upper world, world of light, daytime, world of humans (see *po*).
- barkcloth** felted bark from the paper mulberry tree; when it is plain it is called *tapa*, when it is painted with *kupesi* designs it is called *ngatu*, at which point it is finished and ready for use as a gift, decoration, or dancing costume.
- fahu** a person who may demand support and favors from an individual lower in rank; the fahu is descended from an eldest sister of a father or male ancestor and is a relevant position in funerals when a fahu is chosen from a line of eligible relatives to receive major gifts (see *mehekitanga* and *liongi*).
- failotu** part of the funeral events; an evening prayer service that takes place at the morgue every night from the time of death until the funeral and burial.
- faka'apa'apa** to show deference or respect, typically to people of higher rank or superior status, either broadly in the society or in one's *kainga*.
- faka-Tonga** in the manner of Tongans, Tongan culture.
- fakahela** exhausting, irritating, "a pain in the ass."
- fakapalangi** in the manner of *palangis*, or white Western culture.
- fatongia** the right of a chief to the labor and goods of his people, or work without reward for the benefit of a person of higher rank.
- fiepalangi** wanting to act like or look like a *palangi*, or white Western person.
- kahoa** a necklace often made out of flowers or plant material, like a Hawaiian *lei*
- kainga** extended family, people belong to the *kainga* of one's mother and father; it is broad, inclusive, and people often recognize relatives connected through three to five generations prior as part of their *kainga*.
- kainga lotu** a congregation, church family, can take on similar identity and responsibilities as one's "family" *kainga*.
- kava** a drink made out of dried and ground roots of the kava plant; at times (and at higher echelons of society) this drink is made and served with great ceremony, it is also

very casually consumed in clubs for men that meet every evening. Unmarried women can serve the kava, but do not drink it. In other parts of the Pacific women can drink kava.

***kie*** pandanus leaves that are treated in seawater and the sun to lighten them to a desirable shiny white color; they are prized leaves and used to weave large funeral mats that wrap and cover corpses, or used to weave *ta'ovala* that either remains bright white for formal wear, or they can be darkened for use as mourning *ta'ovala*.

***kiekie*** a handmade skirt, usually made out of plant materials, but it can also be made out of ribbon, raffia, plastic, or a combination of plants and man-made materials. It is worn by women over clothing, usually a Tongan outfit (see *pule taha*). It is categorically similar to *ta'ovala*, but less formal.

***koloa*** wealth, sometimes women's wealth like textiles, but also more broadly used to mean goods sold in a store.

***kupesi*** traditional Tongan designs usually seen painted on barkcloth (which turns it from *tapa* to *ngatu*); currently the designs are seen on t-shirts, fabric, tattoos, and signs.

***liongi*** the people at a funeral who are lowest in rank in relation to the deceased; structurally opposite to the *fahu*. They often do the cooking at a funeral and are from the maternal kin of the deceased. They wear large mourning *ta'ovala* that cover their bodies from head to feet.

***ngatu*** see barkcloth.

***maile*** sweet-smelling waxy leaves from the *maile* shrub, very popular material for use in *kahoa* and other leaf-jewelry (bracelets and anklets) for dancers.

***mana*** power or a person, especially a chief, comes from his or her high rank and/or achievements; according to Gell (1993, 1995), this power must be contained because it is dangerous to people who do not have high enough rank (see *tapu*).

***matapule*** talking chief, appointed by a chief to carry out duties on his behalf.

***mehekitanga*** the eldest sister of the father; she is the highest ranked person within the *kainga* and is accorded the greatest amount of respect—sometimes this takes the form of gifts. She is also accorded special privileges towards her brother and his children.

***misinale*** Tonganized word for mission or missionary; today it refers to the Methodist practice of collecting offerings for the church—a competitive, public, family associated fundraiser.

- mu'i*** backside, hips and bottom.
- pa'anga*** Tongan currency; exchange rate at the time of research was 1 U.S. dollar to 2 Tongan pa'anga.
- pa'ongo*** pandanus leaves that are darker and coarser than *kie*, they are used to make a variety of mats from mourning *ta'ovala* to floor coverings, as these leaves are sturdy enough for such use.
- palangi*** white foreigners; people of European descent.
- po*** dark, night, spirit world, cosmic darkness out of which all forms of life originated, beginning of things, world of the gods. A major goal of religious rituals in Ancient Polynesia was to keep the worlds of *po* and *ao* separate (see *ao*, *mana*, and *tapu*).
- pule taha*** two-piece outfit for women consisting of an ankle-length wrap skirt and a tailored blouse out of the same fabric that hits mid thigh. Usually this outfit is covered by a *ta'ovala* or *kiekie*.
- ta'ovala*** woven mat worn around the waist on top of Tongan clothes (see *tupenu* and *pule taha*). It is worn as a sign of respect, as a statement of nationality and Tongan pride, and to formalize outfits. Bright, *kie* mats are worn on special occasions and rough mats are worn for funerals and mourning.
- tapa*** see barkcloth.
- tapu*** sacred, secret, or forbidden. Someone of high rank is *tapu* to someone of lower rank; the Tongan term for the Pope is *Tu'i Tapu*, for example. *Tapu* can also refer to a set of codes and restrictions that were often meaningfully abandoned, across the Pacific, when key figures decided to begin practicing Christianity .
- tau'olunga*** dance for a solo female; performers oil their skin and on some occasions people press *pa'anga* onto the skin for fundraising or compliments to the dancer.
- Tu'i*** paramount chief.
- tupenu*** tailored wrap skirt for men, extends waist to calf.
- 'ufi*** a type of yam that is very high quality, appropriate for feasts.
- 'umu*** underground oven, food is slow cooked with heated rocks.

### Appendix 3: Tongan Christianity and Constitutional Era Timeline<sup>14</sup>

- **1797** - Taufa'ahau is born to the Tu'i Kanokupolu line; later starts the Tupou dynasty
- **1797** - London Missionary Society missionaries arrive in Tongatapu, and flee in 1800
- **1799** - Civil war begins in Tonga and lasts for the following 50 years
- **1822** - Wesleyan Missionary Society (Methodist) missionaries arrive in Tongatapu
- **1827** - Aleamotu'a, a major chief also in the Tu'i Kanokupolu line, breaks *tapu* and begins practicing Methodist Christianity; some chiefs follow
- **1829** - First baptism in Tonga (Methodist Christianity)
- **1830** - WMS missionaries arrive in Ha'apai, Vava'u, and the Niuas
- **1831** - Taufa'ahau converts to Methodist Christianity and changes his name to George
- **1833** - George unites Ha'apai, Vava'u, and the Niuas; begins to raid Tongatapu
- **1842** - Catholic priests arrive in Tonga (Tongatapu and Vava'u); they appeal to George's enemies, those of the rival Tu'i Tonga line
- **1844-1862** - The Bible is translated into Tongan
- **1845** - George becomes Tu'i Kanokupolu; takes the name George Tupou
- **1848** - Laufilitonga, the Tu'i Tonga, converts to Catholic Christianity
- **1852** - Tongatapu falls to George Tupou; all Tongan islands are united under him as Tu'i Kanokupolu and the civil war ends
- **1862** - Emancipation Edict is enacted and the first opening of Parliament occurs; the Emancipation Edict was intended to secure the powers of the king, it freed commoners from *fatongia* of chiefs, and made education free and compulsory

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<sup>14</sup> All dates prior to 2000 in this timeline are from Campbell 1992, Rutherford 1996, Wood-Ellem 2001; all dates after 2000 are from the following news articles: Cowell 2012, Latu 2015, Perry and Winfield 2015, Tahana 2017.

- **1875** - Constitution is enacted and the Coronation of King George Tupou I occurs; the Constitution was modeled on Hawaii's and was intended to secure Tonga's sovereignty internationally; it also abolished the chieftainship and created a nobility
- **1885** - Free Church of Tonga is established by Rev. Shirley Baker and King George Tupou I; it is independent from the Wesleyan Council in Australia
- **1893** - King George Tupou I dies and is succeeded by his son, who becomes King Saioisi Tupou II
- **1916** - Mormon mission is organized
- **1918** - King Saioisi Tupou II dies and is succeeded by his daughter, who becomes Queen Salote Tupou III
- **1922** - Passport Act is passed, which bans Mormon missionaries from entering Tonga
- **1924** - Passport Act is repealed, the Mormon mission is made legal
- **1924** - Queen Salote attempts to reunite the Wesleyan Mission with the Free Church of Tonga, which results in the Free Wesleyan Church
- **1928** - Free Church of Tonga and the Church of Tonga both split from the Free Wesleyan Church, resulting in three distinct Tongan Methodist denominations
- **1946-1959** - LDS scriptures are translated into Tongan
- **1952** - Liahona High School (LDS-affiliated) is built and the LDS membership sees a substantial increase following this event
- **1964** - "New Mass" occurs in the Catholic Churches in Tonga (and across the world) as a result of Vatican II; Mass is held in the Tongan language rather than Latin
- **1965** - Queen Salote Tupou III dies and is succeeded by her son, who becomes King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV
- **1966** - Catholic Diocese is established, shifting the Catholic Church in Tonga from a mission to a more permanent organization with a Bishop and Cathedral
- **1980** - Tongan Catholic Basilica is finished
- **1983** - LDS Temple is dedicated

- **2006** - King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV dies and is succeeded by his son, who becomes King George Tupou V
- **2006** - Political demonstrations for democratic reform turn violent
- **2010** - First democratically elected parliament in Tonga
- **2012** - King George Tupou V dies and is succeeded by his brother, who becomes King Tupou VI
- **2015** - First Tongan Cardinal is appointed, Soane Patita Paini Mafi
- **2015** - Prince Ata (youngest son of the king) converts to the LDS church



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