FOREIGNERS IN THEIR OWN HOMELAND: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF CRIMINAL DEPORTATION AND REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES

By

MOANA PAHULU HAFOKA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of MOANA PAHULU HAFOKA find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

__________________________________________________________________________
David A. Makin, Ph.D., Chair

__________________________________________________________________________
Melanie-Angela Neuilly, Ph.D.

__________________________________________________________________________
Mary K. Stohr, Ph.D.
This dissertation only credits one name, but so many people have stood beside, behind, and ahead of me during this process. Fakafetā‘i ki he Tamai Hevani he ngaahi tapuaki kuo ne foaki mai kiate au mo hoku famili.

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FOREIGNERS IN THEIR OWN HOMELAND: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

OF CRIMINAL DEPORTATION AND REINTEGRATION

EXPERIENCES

Abstract

by Moana Pahulu Hafoka, Ph.D.
Washington State University
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Chair: David A. Makin

To date, there has been little attention given to the reintegration of convicted criminals after their deportation. While in the United States, programs, and interventions are dedicated for the successful reentry of convicted criminals released within the country. The purpose of this article is to explore how deportees experience a reentry into a place that many of them consider an unfamiliar country. This study specifically examines the experiences of Tongans who have been deported from abroad, back to the islands of Tonga.

Tonga, the last remaining kingdom in the South Pacific, consists of about 169 islands and is inhabited by approximately 100,000 people. Tonga has never been colonized and maintains much of its cultural values and social organization allowing the country to sustain a strong cultural identity. This study will look into the cultural factors that have aided or hindered the reintegration of deportees in their Tongan communities.
Using a qualitative approach, this study involved 12 deportees who participated in a sit-down interview. This research used an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) to ascertain how deportees experienced their transition to Tongan society. The study data was analyzed using IPA, which identified super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes. Reintegration was a superordinate theme that connected all of the subordinate themes that included families, religion, and culture. These themes help to explain how deportees make sense of their transition from the U.S., to Tonga as a deportee. Discussed in this research are the experiences of deportees which are both shared and personal experiences.
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Dedication

To the best grandpa’s in the world;

And to my beautiful Camilla Lole and sweet

Lucy So’onalole, who provided much support

‘Ofa Lahi ‘Atu
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2010, I made an unplanned trip to Tonga, the birth land of my parents. I went unannounced, with no specific plans except to find a resort on the beach to relax and enjoy the tranquility of the ocean sounds. I was surprised to find my aunt sitting next to me on my last flight from Auckland, New Zealand, to Nuku’alofa, Tonga. As we landed in Tonga, she arranged for me to stay with some family members, so any plans I had of hanging out at the beach by myself were overruled. This decision led to an unexpected meeting with my childhood friend “Akataha” (pseudonym).

My aunt made plans for me to stay with my cousins in a village that was not too far from the airport. One evening I accompanied my cousin to her Bible study class, and on the walk home she decided to walk on the opposite side of the road, as it had streetlights and she would feel safer. A few steps into our way back home, I heard someone calling my name from across the road. I couldn’t see well, and it didn’t help that the voice was coming from under a breadfruit tree. I decided to cross the road, as I was sure it had to be a friend or family member who could recognize me in the dark. I approached the breadfruit tree and found my childhood friend Akataha, hanging out with some of his friends. I chatted with him for a few minutes and we exchanged numbers before I walked back home with my cousin. She asked, “How do you know that guy?” I explained that I grew up with Akataha in the United States and had not seen him in several years. “Oh, that guy is not good, and he hangs out with a lot of bad guys. They’re deported,” she said with a concerned look.
This experience piqued my interest in deportations to Tonga from the United States. I had known Akataha for years, and though he was mischievous, I did not see him as a bad or dangerous guy, but as a friend who had made some costly mistakes. Akataha had committed some crimes, and coupled with the fact that he was not a U.S. citizen, this led to his deportation.

Migration from Tonga to the U.S. reached high points in the 1980s and 1990s, and many of the children who migrated during this era were now adults eligible to be deported upon criminal convictions. Questions filled my mind during that trip about how Tongan society viewed deportees. I wondered about the resources available to deportees and if they were anything like the programs available to Tongan Americans who were released from American jails and prisons.

These deportations, mostly a result of criminal convictions in the U.S., are an understudied facet of the intersection of the criminal justice system and immigrant communities. The paucity of research in this particular area provides a valuable opportunity to explore how Tongan deportees experience reintegration, acculturation, and overcoming the challenges of transitioning in a home country that many find unfamiliar.

One of the most pressing issues faced in the United States is the prison revolving door. Much attention has been paid to the causes of and solutions to prisoner reentry outcomes. The U.S. released about 626,000 prisoners from its federal and state facilities in 2016 (United States Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018, p. 1). Addressing the successful transition of these offenders to their communities has been a significant aspect of criminal justice system reform. Many of these reforms include assisting released offenders in locating employment, suitable housing, substance
abuse programs, and providing other supportive services that could help prevent them from reoffending (Petersilia, 2003).

Much of the discussion on reintegrating released prisoners into their communities fails to include criminal deportees. United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE; 2016, p. 3) reported that 201,020 individuals were deported from the U.S. as Priority 1, which includes national security threats, convicted felons or “aggravated felons,” and criminal gang participants. While criminal deportees have experienced the American criminal justice system, little attention is given to them and their experiences returning to their “home nations.” As Golash-Boza (2014) has found, the notion of “home” is complicated for deportees because many have spent most of their lives in the U.S. The reintegration that deportees experience is in some ways similar to release from prison; in both cases, people have spent time as incarcerated offenders and then experience reentry into their communities. The differences, however, are extreme, as deportees reenter a different community, while released prisoners in the U.S. reenter familiar places like their own hometown or state with the support of their families and established programs.

The story of “Ngata” (pseudonym) illustrates some of the issues that many deportees from the U.S. experience. He was born in Tonga in the 1970s and migrated to the U.S. with his family when he was just 3 years old. He had been through the American criminal justice system because of “bad choices and stuff like that.” Ngata tried hard to get away from that lifestyle and pursued the college route. Using his physical talents, he was able to get a football scholarship to a small junior college, but while there he got into trouble and lost his scholarship. This setback did not keep him down for long, and he found himself at another junior college playing football.
and trying to obtain a degree. Things did not pan out the way he wanted with school, so he looked for a job to support himself and his wife. He found a job working for a multinational corporation several hours from his family.

On weekends, Ngata would try to make it back to see his family. On one of these drives, he was pulled over by an officer for speeding. At that time, he was required by a judge to take an anger management class because of a prior domestic violence incident. Ngata was not able to afford the anger management course fees, so he did not enroll, and consequently, when he went to court for the speeding ticket, he was sentenced to 20 days in jail.

On day 19 of his jail sentence, an ICE officer showed up at the jail and escorted Ngata to a federal immigration facility. At that time, he was divorced and had a son. His ex-wife was a U.S. citizen; while they were married he did not file for U.S. citizenship, but remained a lawful permanent resident, or green card holder. Ngata was held for 9 months at the federal detention center while awaiting deportation. He and his family spent several thousand dollars in legal fees to fight his case.

After Ngata had been held in the federal detention facility for 9 months, an officer approached his cell and told him he was going home. “Home? For real?” he asked. The officer told him, “You’re going to Tonga, man,” Ngata recalled. It struck him at that time that he was leaving the U.S. and everything he knew. The officer informed him at 3:00 a.m. of his deportation, and by 11:00 a.m. he was boarding a flight to Tonga.

Deportees experience removal and reintegration differently than released offenders. The revolving door analogy and concomitant discussion that applies to offenders who are American
citizens fails to consider the exit door that deportee’s experience. In addition, when they did not truly grow up in their “home” country, they are faced with cultural barriers in their reintegration process that the current literature on reentry does not fully discuss. Because many deportees have migrated at a young age, cultural disconnection can obstruct the reintegration process and may be misinterpreted as misbehavior or misconduct by community members in the “home” country.

Statement of the Problem

The U.S. deports an average of 28 individuals per year to the Kingdom of Tonga (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2018). Tonga, a constitutional monarchy in the South Pacific, is home to approximately 100,000 people and was dubbed “The Friendly Isles” by Captain James Cook (Rutherford, 1977). In the 1950s, Tongans began migrating to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Ka’iili, 2005; Small, 1997). The population of Tongans in these countries is possibly double the population of Tongans in Tonga (Addo & Besnier, 2008). Tongans have migrated to these countries primarily for educational and employment opportunities (Cowling, 1990).

Concerning deportations and the reintegrative challenges facing deportees, there were 343 Tongans deported from the United States due to criminal convictions between 1998 and 2008 (Pereira, 2011, p. 46). During that time span, there were 15 Tongans deported from New Zealand and Australia combined. Tongan American deportees made up 95% of deportees to Tonga (Pereira, 2011, p. 46). Additionally, the United States deported at least 189 individuals due
to criminal convictions between 2009 and 2017 (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2012, 2016, 2017). As Figure 1 shows, the deportation rate over the past 20 years is steady.

Deportees to Tonga undertake a reintegration into a community and country that they are not familiar with, and thus struggle at times due to ignorance of cultural traditions and expectations. Many of them have been raised in the U.S. and feel more American than they do Tongan. Exploring these experiences will provide significant insights into the challenges that deportees face. Because of the scarcity of information on this group of deportees, their risks and needs are essentially unidentified at this time. Without understanding significant details of the problem, it is difficult to address the issues at hand, including establishing programs and policies that are essential for deportee reintegration.

The deficiency of research on deportees to Tonga has been filled by media representation through documentaries like Tonga: The Last Place on Earth (Travis, 2013) and a news report by New Zealand’s 1 News Now, “Corruption at the heart of Tonga’s meth epidemic” (2018). Tonga: The Last Place on Earth is a documentary on Tongans who have migrated abroad, and have been deported back to Tonga. This documentary influences and suggests to viewers that Tongan men are pathologically violent while stigmatizing immigrants and echoing the rhetoric of in the U.S. that they are criminal and dangerous (Kauvaka, 2015). The gaps in this literature will continue to be filled with televisual representations that raise moral panics and justify the discrimination and maltreatment of deportees.

Studying Deportees to Tonga

Research on deportees and their transitions in Tonga is scarce, but the experiences of deportees across the globe share many commonalities. Deportees experience what is known as “downward assimilation” (Moniz, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Their return to Tonga is unlike that of people from the Tongan diaspora who return to visit family and engage in alumni celebrations, festivities, and special events. Many Tongans from overseas save up to contribute monetarily to such occasions. Deportees do not fit into this category, as they are not coming to visit family or help out monetarily; therefore, they experience downward assimilation. This term clearly points out the potential for deportees experiencing downward mobility, guaranteeing difficulty and hardship upon arrival.
The political and historical context of Tonga and its deportees makes this study unique. Tonga has never relegated control to any foreign powers, but more than half of the world’s Tongan population lives overseas. Many of Tonga’s cultural values, beliefs, and practices have survived through many centuries and global contact. As Tongans migrate overseas, much effort is put into preserving culture, language, and transnational ties, even if they are an ocean away from Tonga.

Compared to countries with large deportation populations and considerable amounts of deportation research, Tonga is small. The country is made up of over 150 small islands. Tongatapu, the main island in the kingdom, is only 100 square miles, about the geographic size of Tallahassee, Florida. Tonga has few deportees compared to countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, and Jamaica, but as shown in Figure 1, the U.S. has deported over 500 individuals to Tonga, a country of 100,000 people. Considering the country’s small population, these deportee numbers can be regarded as problematic. This is coupled with the fact that Tonga, a group of islands, is surrounded by an ocean and is hundreds of miles away from the nearest country.

Deportees to countries such as Mexico and El Salvador are geographically positioned to have an easier route for return than other countries. The title of a newspaper article sheds light on the issue of deportees from near countries who make it back to the U.S.: “He was deported 10 times after committing crimes. Now he’s going to prison” (McDonald, 2018). Deportees to Central American countries can travel by land with numerous points of entry. Deportees to Tonga are placed on an island that is over 5,000 miles from the continental U.S.
The geographic location of countries, especially the distance to the U.S., can affect family relations and plans for family reunification. Deportees who live in countries that are near the U.S. have a better chance for family members to travel and visit them in their home countries. Because deportation orders can prohibit individuals from entering the U.S. for 5 years to life, they may be separated from family for a lifetime if their families do not have the means to travel (Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez, 2008). Tongan deportees with family members who wish to visit them must pay high prices for airplane tickets, as there are no direct flights from the U.S. to Tonga.

*Figure 2.* Tonga is located in the South Pacific Ocean, over 5,000 miles from San Diego, CA, and over 3,000 miles from Honolulu, HI.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Tongan Americans who have been deported. This study will highlight what it is like to be deported to Tonga. Little is known about deportees and their experiences in this small country. The gaps in the research mean that opinions about deportees are heavily influenced by media, allegations, and anecdotes and not based on evidence. Some areas that will be explored in this study include the deportation process and the arrival at Tonga’s international airport, adaptations to geographical and cultural differences, and dealing with barriers such as language and stigma.

Data from this study will provide a better picture of what deportees experience and how they experience reintegration. This study will examine the individual experiences of the participating deportees, as well as the shared experiences. Because of the scarcity of information on this group of deportees, their needs and the risks they face are principally unknown at this time. Identifying and understanding the challenges faced by deportees to Tonga can help in establishing essential programs to meet their needs.

As Tongans migrate to find better opportunities, they face the challenges of adapting to the new culture and environment. As ethnic minorities in a new country and community, they must be able to navigate their way through the new system while maintaining their cultural roots. Children raised and born in the United States to Tongan parents encounter identity issues as they face acculturation while holding on to their Tongan culture.

Second- and third-generation ethnic minorities are found to have higher crime rates than first-generation immigrants (Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006). Tongans are not exempt from the
reality of having more of the second and third generations sent to prison. As they become more acculturated into American society, they face the sad reality that some immigration experiences of early generations result in deportation. How Tongans experience deportation will shed light on acculturation to the American culture, as well as re-acculturation back in Tonga.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will present the relevant literature regarding topics associated with deportation from the U.S. to Tonga. This will include such topics as criminal deportations, policies concerning deportation, and the impact of deportation on families and individuals. The policies discussed in this chapter are important, as several of them have been implemented for over two decades and we continue to see the significance of these policies today, particularly at the southern border of the U.S. The study seeks to give voice to the individual and shared experiences of the deportees.

Deportation

Deportation is the removal of non-citizens from a particular nation under threat from state officials for breaches of immigration or criminal law (Boehm, 2016; Gibney, 2013). It can also take effect when national borders have failed to prevent unlawful entry, when migrants breach the conditions of their admission, and when asylum applications have been denied (Ellerman, 2009). Deportation can be used as a form of social control, deporting non-citizens who commit crimes that constitute felonies or result in imprisonment. Although the U.S. does have written agreements with some nations regarding deportation, such agreements are not required by most nations to accept their deported nationals. Foreign nationals who are deported from the U.S. may be removed without a formal repatriation agreement (United Nations Development Programme, 2012). Tonga receives deportees from the U.S., New Zealand, and Australia, who do
not have any formal bilateral agreements or Memorandum of Understanding to deport criminal offenders.

This research is concerned with criminal deportees; thus, I will discuss policies that are relevant to individuals who have been deported for criminal purposes and not for matters such as overstaying a visa, entering the country illegally, or falsified documents. Criminal deportees differ from other deportees in that they have experienced the American criminal justice system before being returned to their home countries. Tongan Americans who are citizens and have been convicted of a crime will be released into their own communities within the U.S. The reentry that Tongan deportees experience is not back into their communities in the U.S., but in Tonga, a country over 5,000 miles away.

**Policies Affecting Deportation**

In the last two decades, deportation rates have risen sharply. Since the mid-1990s, harsh policies have been adopted leading to millions of non-citizens being deported (Brabeck, Lykes, & Hershberg, 2011; Brotherton & Barrios, 2009; Gibney, 2013; Hagan et al., 2008). These policies include the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), and the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT Act).

The AEDPA was the first of the three laws, enacted in April 1996. The circumstances that led to this law were related to negative sentiment toward immigrants, escalated by two events: the bombing of the World Trade Center in February 1993 and the bombing of Oklahoma City in
April 1995. Though it was later found that two U.S. citizens were responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing, the public demanded that Congress pass punitive and restrictive laws on immigration (Trinh, 2005). This law strengthened the enforcement arm of the federal government by doing away with judicial review for all categories of immigrants eligible for deportation (Hagan et al., 2008), changing the definition of an aggravated felony and expanding the list of crimes that constitute one (Martin, 1998), and operating retroactively, making immigrants who had committed crimes decades ago deportable (Morawetz, 1998).

In the same year that the AEDPA was passed, the IIRIRA was enacted, which increased removals by expanding the categories of noncitizens who were deportable (Hagan, Castro, & Rodriguez, 2009). This legislation restricted the ability of immigrants to appeal deportation, added further offenses for which immigrants could be deported, and expanded the definition of aggravated felonies to include any prison sentence of a year or more, even if the sentence was completed (Hagan et al., 2009; Moore, 2004). Prior to this legislation, an “aggravated felony” was a sentence of 5 or more years for an alien (D. M. Johnson, 2001). Crimes that were committed pre-IIRIRA, though not defined as an aggravated felony at the time of conviction, could now lead to deportation even after completing the prison sentence (Hagan et al., 2008; Morawetz, 1998). The IIRIRA not only was retroactive, but placed overwhelming hurdles in front of immigrants facing deportation.

The AEDPA and the IIRIRA together added 28 more distinct offenses for which people could be deported, including any crimes of violence, gambling-related offenses, and perjury (Peterson, 2009; Trinh, 2005). Jointly, the two acts eliminated legal barriers that protected
immigrants from deportation, restricting judicial review and due process, and established mandatory detention provisions for aliens who committed crimes (Brisbois, Silva, Pereira, & Sethares, 2016; Hagan et al., 2008; Martin, 1998). In addition to these changes, the monetary value thresholds for financial crimes necessary to qualify an alien for deportation were modified. The threshold for money laundering for an alien was reduced from $100,000 to $10,000, and the threshold for tax evasion was reduced from $200,000 to $10,000 (D. M. Johnson, 2001).

![Deportations from the US on Criminal Grounds 1996-2005](image)


The USA PATRIOT Act (2001), signed under the Bush Administration after 9/11, further expanded the powers of the state to detain and deport immigrants who were perceived to be a threat. This act was intended to protect the nation from terrorists, but has created a partial policy that has targeted immigrants.
These three laws have led to unprecedented numbers of deportations in the last two decades. According to Hagan et al. (2008, p. 66), in 2005 the U.S. deported 208,521 individuals, with only 43% deported for criminal reasons. The Department of Homeland Security reported that 31% of those who were deported in 2007 had criminal records (Brabeck et al., 2011, p. 279). These numbers display the shift in immigration policies after World War II that accorded rights to immigrants and the change in treatment of immigrants.

Such legislation has significant consequences for individual deportees and families. Over 2 million non-citizens were deported from the U.S. between 1997 and 2007, and 400,000 alone in 2009 (Gibney, 2013, p. 120). Not only do the laws apply retroactively, but there is no statute of limitations for deportable offences (Golash-Boza, 2014; Morawetz, 2000). The numbers have increased since the legislation in 1996, and they continue to be much higher than they were pre-1996.

These laws have become a symbol of the expansion of power and government surveillance. Though they were created to address terrorism and punishment for those who commit terrorist attacks, these laws have created a higher standard for immigrants in this country without specifically addressing ways to prevent acts like the Oklahoma City bombing. The high standards placed on immigrants have led to an explosion in the number of deportees from the U.S. Before the 1996 legislation, the average number of deportees was 40,000 a year (Hagan et al., 2008, p. 66). From 1996 to 2005, the number of deportees averaged more than 180,000 per year (Hagan et al., 2008, p. 66).
It is evident that the number of deportations increased rapidly after these policies were implemented. The policies seemed to be established to raise the standard for immigrants living in the U.S. This higher standard of living creates antipathy between different racial groups as each group faces specific racial stereotypes. Sociologist William Petersen coined the term “model minority” in a 1996 *New York Times* article (Yukich, 2013). This model situates Asian Americans at the top, as exemplars and as the model that other immigrants should strive to be like (S. Lee, 2009). Immigrants who are accepted and deserving have embraced American values such as hard work and self-reliance (Yukich, 2013). Immigrants who can embrace this are considered deserving of U.S. citizenship, while those who supposedly do not are thought undeserving of citizenship and are not welcomed. Latinos and African Americans are largely perceived, unfairly, as rejecting those values. Thus we see that U.S. policies regarding deportation are actions to punish and remove immigrants and racial groups who do not assimilate and who are unfairly perceived as undeserving of U.S. citizenship and unworthy to remain in the country.

**Impact of Deportation on Families**

Current U.S. enforcement policy restricts deportees from reentering the U.S. for 5 years to life (Hagan et al., 2008). Since 2007, deportation has divided over 1 million families (Gonzalez & Consoli, 2013). Zayas and Bradlee (2014) reported that in 2014, 5,100 children were in foster care as a result of having a detained or deported parent. They also estimated that 15,000 more children would be separated from families and placed in foster care in the next 5 years. This does not include children who are living with other family members and friends. Children may fall between the cracks of parental and governmental supervision, making it difficult for them to be
raised in a single, stable home. Family members caring for children may find it difficult to do so without the legal custody to register for school and recreational programs.

According to the United States Constitution, children born within the borders of the United States are natural-born citizens regardless of their parents’ nationality (Price, 1997). This creates “mixed-status families,” which can be problematic, as children then become vulnerable to losing their parent or their country (Mahr, 2008). In recent years, the complications of immigration policy regarding this issue have amplified, as many deportees have children who are born in the U.S. Arguments have been made for parents to be allowed to stay in this type of scenario, as their deportation would cause an “extreme hardship” for the child (Mahr, 2008). Children that are left behind are put up for adoption or foster care and are trapped in a country where they have little or no connection because there is no framework to protect their individual and family rights (Boye, 2004). More often than not, the deportation of parents terminates their parental rights to children who remain in the U.S. (Ferguson, 2007). Children of deported individuals often experience post-traumatic stress disorder, separation anxiety, and depression (Kaskade, 2009). Spouses also experience negative psychological and psychosocial consequences for themselves and the children (Brabeck et al., 2011).

Deportation has effects that extend to people or family members in the receiving country. Remittances, or money sent overseas to families, are a large reason why immigrants have made the U.S. their home. Immigrants are able to find jobs and send remittances to assist their families. It is also a tool used by immigrants to strengthen familial and kin bonds. Money remitted back to families from the U.S. is used to improve the life and situations in developing countries. Many
Deportees are remitters: in a study by Hagan et al. (2008), 72% of deportees were remitters. This leaves an economic void for the families who received these remittances. Remittances from migrant remitters total $100-$200 billion annually (Ellermann, 2009). This is the second largest capital flow to developing countries after foreign direct involvement, and disrupting this process interferes with family life. When remitters are deported, families that are accustomed to receiving financial assistance from abroad are cut off from that support, which was vital to their well-being.

Many deportees also reach out to families in the U.S. to plead for remittances. Reaching out to families may help deportees survive in their home country, but it serves as a sharp reminder of what has been lost (Golash-Boza, 2014). Deportees feel shame and disgrace because they were once the breadwinners for their families, but deportation has severed them from their work and income-generating activities (Hagan et al., 2008). This shame can be carried for a lengthy period because the responsibility they once held and the opportunity to provide have been lost.

Impact of Deportation on Individuals

Although deportation may have severe effects on others, the starkest effects are felt by the deportees. Deportees feel social separation from their family in the U.S., and also feelings of displacement in their new homeland (Brisbois et al., 2016). Many deportees feel ostracized in their own country because they have lived for many years in the U.S., and may not be familiar with the language and culture of their homeland (Moniz, 2004). Deportees feel “othered,” and
though they may have the same physical features as those in their homeland, they are socially and culturally distanced. They express feelings of separation and of betrayal at the hands of the U.S. government as they saw themselves stripped of what they thought were their “inalienable” rights, confusion as they tried to understand their new statelessness and the permanence of the removal process, and trauma as they experienced a “massive” dislocation of their social life. (Brotherton & Barrios, 2009, p. 36)

Deportees are sometimes the scapegoats for social ills and crimes in their new homeland. In Tonga, they are blamed for rising crime rates and violence and are regarded with hostility by most Tongans (H. Lee, 2017). Tonga experienced riots in the capital of Nuku’alofa where six people died and hundreds were injured. Some government officials blamed deportees for inciting and instigating the violence (Conway & Potter, 2009). As Radio New Zealand (2006) reported, Drew Havea, president of Tonga’s National Youth Congress, said “some of the blame can be placed on deportees from the U.S. who have been sent back to Tonga and brought with them an expertise in gang violence” (para. 7).

Headley (2006) discusses in his research among Jamaican deportees the conception of the constructed enemy of the community. They become detested nearly at arrival in their homeland because they have been labeled as enemies and failures. Wacquant (1999) argues that immigrant actions have been criminalized and given special attention by police, then reinforced and amplified by media and politicians who have pushed xenophobia across the land. Those who are different have become the “suitable enemy,” the scapegoats for crime and social ills. As they
experience these labels, deportees then become difficult to find and study because of the discrimination they feel from their fellow countrymen (Miller, 2012).

Robertson et al. (2012) interviewed female deportees to Mexico who pointed out that they were assumed to be Mexican despite having little connection or knowledge of the country. As a respondent remarked, “They interviewed me and told me I couldn’t be in the United States. I had to get deported, you know. . . . I consider the [United States] as my country, you know? Not anywhere else. . . . I don’t know anybody [in Mexico]” (Robertson et al., 2012, p. 508). Deportees may identify more with being American than the country they are being deported to, and may have spent almost their entire lives in the U.S. This disconnection may further exacerbate the feelings of being displaced.

Deportees in their homeland face a great deal of stigmatization. Stigma can lead to social isolation and add shame to their experience in their homeland (Gibney, 2013). As Guarnizo (1994) shares, natives can easily spot these deportees by their language, dress, and walk (Brotherton & Barrios, 2009). This can direct unwanted attention toward deportees. Deportees stand out and would not like attention, especially when media portrays them as “rejects” who have returned as violent criminals (Headley, 2006). Experiencing these labels makes reintegration difficult for them, as many work opportunities are denied because of the stigma. Stigma does not allow deportees to reintegrate easily into their new communities (Miller, 2012), which can affect deportees’ ability to gain employment and integrate.

Individual deportees also face a cultural shock in returning to their homeland, a place they may not remember. The literature is filled with the notion that deportees’ “homelands” are not
their natural homes (Dingeman-Cerda, 2017). After they have spent most of their lives abroad, the reverse cultural shock is sometimes experienced alone, or with very little support. For many deportees, the only connection to the country or the people is their citizenship, so navigating post-deportation life can be extremely challenging.

Brisbois et al. (2016) discuss several consequences of deportation: trauma and of sudden family separation; financial, health, social, and psychological consequences; and financial burden for families. The trauma that deportees face because of being separated from family is understated. Many deportees have spent weeks or months in detention awaiting deportation (Onyoin, 2017). One deportee spoke of the difficulties dealing with family separation: “I cried the entire flight. My two boys mean the world to me and since being here it has been so tough adjusting” (Pereira, 2011, p. 29). Upon deportation, it is common for deportees not to be greeted at the airport by anyone. As one deportee said, “I will be setting foot on a place where I will be a stranger to my own people” (Pereira, 2011, p. 28).

Many deportees return to their homeland with only elementary or basic knowledge of the language and culture. Language, of all acculturation behaviors, has been found to be the best predictor of psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Masgoret & Gardner, 1999). Khmer deportees experienced increased distress after deportation because of their poor Khmer language abilities (Ayhens-Johnson, 2012). Not having language skills in their new country can isolate deportees, which can further exacerbate the difficulties of transitioning into a new community. This may lead to difficulty in obtaining jobs or being accepted. Deportees have the ability to take with them gang and resistance subcultures from urban US cities, which can be
easily accepted by youth in countries that are influenced by American media (Brotherton & Barrios, 2009).

Deportees are one of many types of return migrants. The different types of return migrants share similar challenges as they return to the countries of their birth and experience the reintegration process. The home country determines the reintegration process of returnees and shapes their expectations (Cassarino, 2004). Deportees then must adapt to the expectations of their home country and behave according to local community expectations to be accepted.

Transnational relationships for return migrants are sustained through regular contact over time and space (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). If deportees have maintained a relationship with family members in Tonga, it will greatly benefit them throughout the reintegration process. Regular visits to the home country also help to retain and strengthen the link between the individual and the home country (Cassarino, 2004). It is unlikely for deportees to have developed these relationships before they were deported. Nevertheless, research shows that return migrants who have maintained relationships over time and through country borders can have links that are significant when the process of reintegration begins.

Transnational identities are also important and play an integral role in adjustment in the home country. Tsuda (2001) found that Japanese returning to Japan from Brazil experienced difficulties adapting and were rejected and treated as foreigners. These return migrants experienced a social alienation that “contributed to the emergence of an identification process which is neither totally based here or there” (Cassarino, 2004, p. 8). Return migrants can
experience issues of identifying as one or the other, and in many instances feeling “othered” in both the host country and the home country.

As deportees wrestle with which country to identify with, it is important to understand that the home country communities have the position to create the adaptation expectations. Torkington and Ribeiro (2018) argue that categorization as an ingroup member or an outgroup member is not assigned or given, but created through everyday interaction with the community. In many instances, deportees may not be socially accepted in their home country. When their expectations of being accepted are disappointed, individuals may feel social alienation, discontent, and displeasure (Tsuda, 2001). As Tsuda (2001) reports, when individuals are not accepted in their home country, they feel “shock, indicating a more powerful experience of social alienation” (p. 20).

Deportation and the experiences of reintegration can cause post-traumatic stress disorder and much agony (Brotherton & Barrios, 2009; Gibney, 2013). The process of deportation can take a further psychological toll on the deportee and add to the already stressful experience. Some face the embarrassment of being escorted through airports and on airplanes. Deportees feel a sense of failure, guilt, and shame, especially when families have pooled resources for their emigration. Facing family members in their homeland then becomes awkward and difficult for the deportee. These are just a few of the issues that deportees face in trying to reintegrate with a community they are forced back into, where they are not accepted.
Analogous Deportation Reentry Programs

Like many migrant groups, Jamaicans have felt the impact of the AEDPA and IIRIRA laws passed in 1996. Jamaicans face high deportation rates: 1 in 24 legal permanent residents have been deported back to Jamaica since 1996 (Golash-Boza, 2014). On average, Jamaican deportees have spent 12 years in the U.S. before deportation, and the average age of migration to the U.S. was 23 years old (Golash-Boza, 2014). Jamaican deportees have been blamed for the country’s high crime rates, especially violent crimes.

Deportees in Jamaica are seen as threats to public safety. Many deportees are U.S. taught, meaning their criminal behaviors were learned in the U.S. and not in Jamaica before they migrated (Headley, 2006). Negative characterizations of deportees have come from people in higher levels of the Jamaican government, including the commissioner of police and the prime minister. This negative portrayal undermines the work that is done at the community level in Jamaica (Headley, 2006).

The government in Jamaica devised a program that provides temporary assistance and housing, but does not emphasize reintegration. The only non-governmental program that does assist in deportee reintegration is Cornerstone Christian Ministries in Kingston (Charles, 2010). Cornerstone Christian Ministries focuses on a spiritual transformation while providing training in construction, cabinet making, welding, and agriculture as well as information and communication technology (Charles, 2010). Though the efforts of Cornerstone Christian Ministries are commendable, they face the daunting task of trying to help thousands of deportees who are spread out through the whole island. Cornerstone is facing these issues with little help from the
government and little support from the private sector. Deportees continue to face stigma and discrimination with no ongoing public education program to help lessen the shame (Charles, 2010).

Coutin (2013) examined the experiences of individuals who were raised in the U.S. and then deported to El Salvador as adults. Many Salvadoran immigrants to the U.S. left during the country’s civil war. Between 1980 and 1992, Salvadoran children were separated from their families because of the conflict and relocated in the U.S. (Coutin, 2013). One estimate is that 25% of the Salvadoran population migrated to the U.S. (Dingeman-Cerda, 2017). In 2014, Salvadoran deportees constituted the fourth largest group, behind Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2016). Many of the Salvadoran immigrants left El Salvador as children and were separated from their parents; deportation to El Salvador separated them from their families once again, this time from children in the U.S. (Coutin, 2013).

Bienvenidos a Casa, or Welcome Home, is a deportee reintegration program in El Salvador that greets deportees at the airport and provides resettlement assistance to over 10,000 deportees (Hagan et al., 2008). Bienvenidos a Casa provides services such as money for bus tickets, referrals to social services, counseling services, and a job placement initiative to help deportees locate employment (Coutin, 2013; Hagan et al., 2008; Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004). The El Salvador government created an office to provide further services including follow-ups for deportees and connecting them to vocational training, as well as skills to encourage small start-ups (Rietig & Villegas, 2015).
An additional program in El Salvador that assists deportees in the reintegration process is the Center for Care for the Returned Migrant, or Centro de Atencion al Migrante Retornado (Rietig & Villegas, 2015). This program provides immediate support: deportees stepping off the plane are greeted by a representative from the program as well as a representative from the government. The support and encouragement for the deportees to El Salvador appears promising, but there is little evidence regarding the long-term reintegration support that these programs provide.

**Tongan Americans**

To better understand Tongan deportees, it is important to understand Tongan Americans and Tongan transnationalism. Specifically, I will discuss sociocultural factors such as shame, religion, and acculturation as primary factors relevant to discussing deportation to Tonga. These factors are relevant to Tongan Americans because they influence how individuals experience acculturation in the U.S. as well as how deportees meet challenges in Tonga.

*Tongan culture and shame.* Braithwaite’s shaming theory suggests that shame encompasses “all social processes of expressing disapproval which have the intention or effect of invoking remorse in the person being shamed” (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 100). Braithwaite also suggests that shaming is conditioned by the degree of communitarianism within a society (Schaible & Hughes, 2011). This suggests that cultures with higher degrees of communitarianism would have lower levels of crime and deviance. The synnomie theory (Adler, 1983) posits that nations with low crime rates will have a shared normative system and at least one social control system that maintains integration. Specifically, Adler defines synnomie as “a congruence of
norms to the point of harmonious accommodation” (Adler, 1983, p. 158). The integration of values and norms is strengthened by a hierarchical society and relationships that emphasize respect and conformity (Nivette & Neuilly, n.d.).

Because of Tonga’s history of never relegating power to a foreign country, many of its practices and traditions have remained unchanged over time. Tonga has maintained a culture that is structured around collectivity and communitarianism through cultural rituals, ceremonies, and other traditions. The norms are also passed on through generations of conformity. With a high level of communitarianism within the Tongan society, it is expected, according to Braithwaite’s theory, that Tonga will have lower levels of crime and deviance.

The structure of Tongan society is hierarchical, and Tongans understand that disrespecting someone of higher rank can bring shame to the family. The term taboo comes from the Tongan word tapu. Freud (1913) popularized the word to mean something that is prohibited. The taboos in Tongan culture are used for social control, regulating the behaviors of Tongan people. There is a strong commitment to uphold the dignity of one’s family, village, and nation and to avoid shame.

In examining the types of shame, Braithwaite (1989) suggests that cultures that shame to stigmatize reinforce alienation and tend to have higher rates of crime. Schaible and Hughes (2011) posit that communitarianism and shameing are impacted by the structural characteristics of societies. These two statements suggest that cultures that apply disintegrative shaming will result in higher levels of crime.
Reintegrative shaming is “disapproval that is respectful of the person, is terminated by forgiveness, does not label the person as evil, nor allows condemnation to result in a master status trait” (Harris, 2006, p. 328). When people are shamed in this way, it is followed up with moral emotions such as embarrassment, shame, pride, and guilt (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Conversely, disintegrative shaming leads to stigmatization.

Braithwaite (1989) argues that two mechanisms come into play. First, reintegrative shaming deters people from offending because of the desire to maintain valuable relationships (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Second, internalized controls are established that can communicate what behaviors are wrong.

Within the Tongan family lies the well-regarded value of anga fakatonga (the Tongan way). Anga fakatonga is taught to children at a young age and is the defining element of the Tongan identity. It is based on love and generosity, displayed through divulging of goods, time, and self to family, friends, and community (Hansen, 2004; Morton, 1996). The value of anga fakatonga emphasizes the importance of obedience, kinship, and community. Therefore, if anyone is viewed as disobedient, unloving, or ungenerous to family or kin, they are regarded as socially inept, or vale.

As Morton (1996) explains, vale is any form of incompetence. This incompetence tends to be treated impatiently or to be regarded as amusing or shameful. Accordingly, someone who is disobedient to parents or someone who clumsily trips and falls down can be regarded as vale. The ambiguity of vale reveals a wide spectrum of instances where an individual can be treated
negatively or regarded as shameful. Thus it is in the core of Tongan beliefs that to live *anga fakatonga* is to perform one’s duties in a way that will not result in petulant treatment or shame.

Tongan philosopher and historian Futa Helu (1993) understood the Tongan culture to be a shame culture. By this, Helu meant that Tongans value their interpersonal and group relationships and seek to polish their public image through demonstrations of generosity or friendliness. It becomes shameful in Tonga for individuals who do not live *anga fakatonga*. The concept of *vale* then can include any type of unaccepted, offensive behavior, for this type of behavior brings shame in the Tongan culture.

In her ethnographic studies, Morton (1996) found that any type of bad behavior brought shame, or *ma*, not only to the individual, but also to the family. In a culture where communitarianism levels are high, actions of the individual are extremely attached to the family. Therefore, if an individual does something unruly, *ma* is experienced by the whole family.

The dynamics of *ma* in Tongan society have been a resilient social control over time and space, which coincides with Braithwaite’s internalized mechanism controls. Bernstein (1983) explains that the ability of social control to keep individuals within proper behavioral limits is essential in maintaining one’s social standing. Social standing in a communitarian society such as Tonga’s can affect people’s reputation, which is a readily contested criterion and which has more autonomy than other criteria such as education or wealth. This also extends to family members and kin.

A lack of self-control brings about *ma*, and also leads to loss of respect and status. In Marcus’s (1978) study of status rivalry in Tonga, he described Tongan men as self-controlled,
cautious, and sensitive to proper presentations of self. These attributes are centered on the culture’s importance of emotional restraint and avoiding shame. Helu (1993) detailed that Tongans “avoid shame (or loss of face) like the plague,” indicating the significance of emotional restraint and saving face in Tongan society (p. 191).

In their efforts to avoid shame, Tongans are cautious not to offend others, especially those who have a higher social standing. The Tongan hierarchy consists of three levels: royalty, nobles, and commoners. Within these levels are separate categories determined by seniority, gender, and kinship relations (Frengley-Vaipuna, Kupu-Maclntyre, & Riley, 2011). A person’s status is relevant to whomever else is present; thus, it is important to first know one’s relations to other people before understanding one’s status and the responsibilities of that position. Performing one’s responsibilities with love and generosity can aid in avoiding shame and dishonor. However, Tonga is not exempt from deviance or offense, even with so many social constructions that forbid it. When someone does something that is offensive, the family or village of that individual must make amends to dispel the shame placed on their family.

An ancient ceremony called the hu lou ifi allowed for the offending party to seek peace and forgiveness from those they have offended (Filihia, 1999). The hu lou ifi ceremony is still carried out today in instances of serious but not necessarily criminal offenses. This ceremony displays humility, submission, peace, and forgiveness. In this ceremony, members of the offender’s family will wear leaves of the chestnut tree, ifi, which represent humility before the person who has been offended. The ifi were used for underground earth ovens in the traditional way of cooking, and the duty of cooking was performed by lower-ranking people. Therefore, the
ifi signified humility as well as submission to plead for forgiveness. A supply of traditional gifts and materials, including tapa cloth, handwoven mats, and plant foods, is offered to the offended person.

In an effort to save a village from shame, a hu lou ifi took place after one of the king’s private homes was burned down. The house was unoccupied at the time, and burned down before fire services arrived. On February 29, 2008, the village of Tatakomotonga convened a hu lou ifi procession to the king’s palace (“Tatakamotonga Hu Lou Ifi to the King,” 2008). In ancient times, the ceremony could sometimes take hours, leaving people to sit for hours under the sun to wait for an answer. When the hu lou ifi is accepted, the shame of the people is lifted. Though the hu lou ifi is not a common ritual anymore, the Tongan people still seek other ways to remove shame placed on them as a result of bad or deviant behavior.

Marcus (1978) observed in Tonga that shame was keyed primarily to an awareness of external sanctions. The desire to be included, accepted, and recognized among the group in a communitarian society such as Tonga’s is a chief motive to place external sanctions at the front of this issue. When people are faced with external sanctions such as denunciation or rejection, shame becomes a deterrent to carrying out undesirable actions.

Stigmatizing shame places the shame on the actor and results in the actor feeling embarrassment, humiliation, or disgrace. Tonga is an example of a culture that heavily relies on stigmatizing shame. However, the stigmatizing shame used in Tongan society is used to humble the actor and place responsibilities on the actor and actor’s family to make restitution, which only comes after the actor has become remorseful and apologetic. The ceremony of hu lou ifi is
the reintegrative element that connects the culture to Braithwaite’s theory. This ceremony is vital to the culture, and its reintegrative power overshadows the stigmatizing shame. The stigmatizing shame may occur more frequently than the reintegrative ceremonies, yet the occasional occurrences of the ceremonies also add to the inviolability and influence.

Hay (2001) stated that communities with higher levels of reintegrative shaming should have lower rates of crime. The inverse, then, would also be true: that communities with higher levels of stigmatizing shame should have higher rates of crime. In Tonga, there are very high levels of stigmatizing shame, yet they report relatively low rates of crime. Braithwaite’s theory explains the low rates of crime when reintegrative shaming is applied to the offenders, but does not illuminate why low crime rates exist with high levels of stigmatizing shame.

Using reintegrative shaming theory to explain Tonga’s crime levels is strengthened by the inclusion of social bonds and their influence on a person’s likeliness to violate the law (Sherman, 1993). The power of the reintegrative ceremonies over stigmatization can demonstrate how social bonds restore an individual after committing an offense. Even if stigmatization levels are high, the reintegration of individuals into society shows that shaming recognizes human weakness and allows offenders to be restored and stronger bonds to be formed.

Though Braithwaite’s reintegrative shaming holds up well in Tongan communities, it leaves gaps in explaining how stigmatizing shame is used as a tool to increase the strength of moral and social bonds after restitution. These bonds are the foundation of a communitarian society, and the effects include low crime rates. It also does not explain the high levels of disintegrative shaming while still experiencing relatively low crime rates.
Samoa

Samoa sits about 500 miles northeast of Tonga and shares its Polynesian heritage. Samoa has served as the center of Polynesian culture for over 2,000 years (Poasa, Mallinckrodt, & Suzuki, 2000). Germany once claimed Samoa as a colony; it was expelled by New Zealand and then regained its independence from New Zealand in 1962. Through the influence of Germany and New Zealand, Samoa was able to maintain its traditions and social structures. The chiefs, or matai, make up the fono, council, and are responsible for major decisions (Maxwell & Hayes, 2006). The fono is also responsible for maintaining order and preserving the Samoan customs. They control the system that reprimands offenders and restores order (Maxwell & Hayes, 2006). This social structure demonstrates a level of communitarianism that maintains a low crime rate, similar to Tonga’s.

Samoa shares many similarities with Tonga. One of them is the concept of ma. Both Tonga and Samoa share the same word for shame. It is not a surprise, then, that they share many similarities in how ma acts as a control and manages levels of crime. The Samoan way, fa’a Samoa, is similar in many regards to Tonga’s anga fakatonga. Fa’a Samoa describes the Samoan customs and traditions that are taught and practiced in the family and in village life (Vakalahi & Godinet, 2008). Vakalahi and Godinet found that the benefits of fa’a Samoa include preserving values such as reciprocity and respect in the family and the community. When one does not show respect to family or the community, external sanctions such as banishment, physical punishment, and shame are experienced.
Ma is a collective feeling in Samoa, such that when one member of the family commits a wrong, the whole family is shamed (Tuala-Warren, 2002). In a collectivist society such as Samoa’s, family solidarity is strengthened even after dissolution. Shame and conflict in the family and community are usually handled by the matai and infrequently result in an ifoga, an exchange where one group submits to a ritual and public shame in return for forgiveness of an offense. This is beneficial for inter-group solidarity in Samoa (Macpherson, 2005).

Similar to the Tongan hu lou ifi, the Samoan ifoga is a traditional, public act of self-humiliation that is a form of apology. As shame is a form of social control, it aids in controlling bad and offensive behavior. When bad acts are committed, shame continues to act as a cultural general deterrent. Bad acts committed against high-status individuals bring more shame to the family, and require family to conduct the self-humiliating ceremony of ifoga.

In January of 2014, a young teenager participated in a video that ridiculed Samoa’s Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Malielegaoi. The teenager was arrested and held in custody for using insulting words (Field, 2014). This incident brought much shame to the village of Sili, and the matai acted quickly to enforce a fine on the family. According to Field (2014), the family was fined NZ$5200, 30 cartons of tinned fish, and two cows. This fine demonstrates the hierarchical structure that exists in both the cultural dominion and the state. The family, along with the matai, also traveled to the capital city of Apia to perform the ifoga at Prime Minister Tuilaepa’s residence. The ifoga not only asks for forgiveness of the actions of a family member, but fulfills the cultural duty a family has to maintain healthy relationships.
Samoans, like Tongans, are very sensitive to being shamed. An ifoga allows Samoans to lessen the shame. Failing to perform an ifoga would result in greater shame to the family or the village (Tuala-Warren, 2002). The whole nation learns from a high-profile ifoga, and the village chiefs, elders, and parents take responsibility for implementing restraint upon younger generations. Though the villagers of Sili may have the same attitudes as the teenager who was arrested, they would rather put effort into lessening the shame than argue for the young man’s freedom of speech. In this example, and in many examples of the use of an ifoga, the offenses seem to flow toward power.

Shame has become a potent force for control and has its societal benefits, like established conformity (Mead, 1928). Samoan youth are much more afraid of being shamed than of physical punishments, which has provided motivation to learn in any situation. An old Samoan saying, “Esili le oti i lo le ma,” is translated as “death is better than shame.” Shame not only discourages bad behavior, but also places heavy pressure on the youth to conform to fa’a Samoa.

Though fa’a Samoa may be seen as a stringent control mechanism, it also recognizes human sensitivity and the willingness to forgive. Individuals who display bad behaviors may experience external sanctions, but forgiveness under fa’a Samoa is just as dynamic to society as shame is. An ifoga is not limited as an expression of guilt, but also allows the offended party to practice forgiveness and mend relationships that have been damaged. This portion of the ifoga highlights the desire for Samoans to reintegrate individuals who have done wrong. The reintegrative ceremonies in Tonga and Samoa, although infrequent, show the integrity, influence, and importance of reintegrating individuals.
The literature on deportees to Samoa is scant at best. Between 1998 and 2008, there were 124 Samoans deported for criminal purposes from the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand; 99 of them were deported from the U.S. (Pereira, 2011, p. 45). During that same time period, 358 Tongans were deported from the U.S., Australia and New Zealand; 343 of them were deported from the U.S. (Pereira, 2011, p. 46). These numbers spotlight the large percentages of deportees coming from the U.S. These figures also point out that there are nearly three times more deportees to Tonga than Samoa, despite the large population differences in the U.S. According to the U.S. Census (2010), Samoans numbered 184,440, while there were 57,183 Tongans in the U.S. One of the possible reasons for this disparity is the migration of each ethnicity. Samoan migration waves began largely in the 1950s and continued for decades (Lewthwaite, Mainzer, & Holland, 1973). Also, with American Samoa being a territory of the U.S., many Samoans had legal papers to remain in the U.S. Accordingly, since Samoans have been in America for more generations, they are more likely to have been born in the U.S. or born in American Samoa and be American nationals. Tongans, on the other hand, experienced large migration waves to the U.S. in the 1970s, and Tonga is not a territory of the U.S.; thus, many Tongan migrants would be adults and eligible to be deported back to Tonga upon a criminal conviction.

Japan

Japan is similar to Tonga in many ways. It is an island in the Pacific Ocean and a country that has clung to traditional codes of social behavior (Adler, 1983). It is also a hierarchical society where individuals are expected to understand their position and role. Like those of Tonga, Japan’s crime rates are relatively low (Hamai & Ellis, 2008). Because of their hierarchical society
and respect for authority, Japanese are largely dutiful, submissive, and cooperative with authorities (Sakiyama, Lu, & Liang, 2011). Japan is a highly shame-conscious culture, which can be attributed to the cultural emphasis on maintaining status roles within groups (Lebra, 1976). As a social control, shame in Japanese culture can be compared to shame in Polynesian cultures such as Tonga and Samoa. Tonga, a collectivistic country like Japan, also promotes the importance of familial and societal roles. The Pacific Island nations are expected to display reintegrative shaming comparable to Japan. However, because deportations to Japan are few in number, the literature on deportations to Japan is almost nonexistent.

**Tongan Religion**

It is nearly impossible to define Tongan culture without religion. Religion helps to reinforce concepts of Tongan culture and transnationalism. Though Tonga was never colonized by a foreign power, it did accept and embrace the colonial practice of religion. Christianity, specifically, is manifested in Sunday worship and observance and the cross on the national flag. Christianity influences many Tongans’ reasons for migrating to the U.S. and other Western countries (Small, 1997).

Historically, Tongans were a polytheistic people, but many converted to Christianity when missionaries from the Western world traveled to the islands (Morrell, 1946). Chief Taufa’ahau, who would become the first king of a unified Tonga, was converted to Christianity in the early 1800s. King Taufa’ahau declared Wesleyanism the official religion of the Tongan Kingdom and dedicated the country to the Christian God (Morrell, 1946). When Christianity became the
religion of the country, the Tongan flag was changed to include a red cross in the corner with a white background, signifying the cross that Jesus died on (W. Smith, n.d.).

Tongans quickly embraced the monotheistic religion and have maintained a strongly Christian culture. For example, keeping the Sabbath day holy by attending church and avoiding doing business is common in Tonga. Also, ideas of the Holy Spirit have been well accepted by Tongans, as they place a high value on spiritual healing, and there is a belief that deceased ancestors frequently come back as spirits (Olson, 2001). Tongans in America typically belong to the Protestant, Catholic, or Mormon churches, and have centered their lives on the church (Small, 2002).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was instrumental in the early stages of migration, and helped Tongans settle in Hawaii and Salt Lake City (Small, 2002). These two areas have large Tongan communities with foundations built by Tongan migrants decades ago. Today, there are also a variety of religious congregations in Alaska, California, Texas, Florida, Washington, and Arizona that conduct their meetings in the Tongan language. Religion continues to play a significant role in the lives of Tongans, regardless of location and residence (Hafoka, ‘Ulu’ave, & Hafoka, 2013). Carlson (2014) reported that many members of the Tongan Crip Gang attended church while still participating in gang activity. This shows that regardless of their position in life or activities during the week, many Tongans observe Sunday for religious practice.

Religion has played a major role in providing support networks and educational opportunities for Tongans migrating to the U.S. (Maron & Connell, 2008). These networks also provide social support and a chance for Tongan identity to be developed overseas. Religion can
also be a coping mechanism when dealing with deportation and reintegration. Many Tongans are involved with various Christian churches in the U.S.; they are noticeable and accessible to members of the community. Having a support system like religion or a support group from a local congregation can help deportees face challenges of reintegrating into the community.

**Acculturation of Tongan Americans**

The concept of *anga fakatonga* or “the Tongan way” is ambiguous and allows Tongans to choose when to follow it (Morton, 1998). A majority of Tongans identified *faka’apa’apa* or “respect” as the core of *anga fakatonga* and a concept crucial to the preservation of culture that must be passed on to future generations (H. Lee, 2004). Disproportionate delinquency among Tongan youth may be an indication of cultural alienation and loss of *faka’apa’apa* or “respect” (H. Lee, 2004). As they begin to lose *faka’apa’apa*, younger and second-generation Tongans have seemed to follow the trend of other immigrants by becoming more involved in crime than the first generation. Migration evidently impacts the value and practice of *faka’apa’apa* (Hafoka et al., 2013).

The Classic Assimilation Theory emphasizes that for ethnic minorities to assimilate into mainstream culture, they have to enter into intense and intimate “primary group” relations with members of the majority (Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006). A key hypothesis by Park and Burgess, who are foundational in the construction of the theory, is that assimilation is the catalyst for the full integration of ethnic minorities into the dominant group and for the economic advancement of minorities (Morenoff & Astor, 2006). Tongans are on different points of this spectrum ranging from full assimilation to dissonant acculturation.
Educational attainment and employment (income) have been the impetus for Tongans moving to America, which would make assimilation a natural endeavor according to Park and Burgess. One avenue where Tongans have assimilated well is athletics. Football has been a vehicle for socioeconomic status attainment for Tongans; they have used their natural physiques to climb ladders of education, social status, and income. Tongans in the sport of rugby have relocated their families to countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, France, and Japan on professional contracts.

In the U.S., the dream for many young male athletes is to make it to the National Football League (NFL). Cohn and Vainuku (2015) produced a documentary film, *In Football We Trust*, that examined the Polynesian football phenomenon. According to the documentary, football is a vehicle for Tongan athletes to gain a college education and to have it all paid for, as well as a means to support their families. Several Tongans have excelled in the NFL, including Haloti Ngata, Chris Kemoeatu, Vai Sikahema, and Star Lotulelei; according to *Matangi Tonga*, there were 21 Tongans on NFL rosters in 2014 (“21 Tongans in the NFL,” 2014). Though only a few make it to the NFL, having a family member or friend reach that level has been very rewarding for Tongan communities. This is a symbol that Tongans have “made it” in the realm of football.

As Tongan immigrants try to assimilate into American culture, they still face challenges of being accepted as authentic Americans. Asian Americans have been accepted as the “model immigrant” (S. Lee, 2009), and Pacific Islanders’ difficulties in education and employment are masked and subsumed when they are classed with other Asians as a monolithic group, which can trivialize their experiences.
Rumbaut, Gonzales, Golnaz, Morgan, and Tafoya-Estrada (2006) expressed that many first-and second-generation immigrants come to the United States with their immigrant parents’ customs and an American outlook and frame of reference. First-generation immigrants numbered 34.5 million in 2000, and 40% of them were under the age of 18 (Rumbaut et al., 2006). These figures show not only the recent immigration, but also the number of young adults and children who will experience acculturation and adopt new customs and traditions.

In some instances, children will learn and adopt American culture and lose their immigrant culture. This type of acculturation was defined by Portes and Rumbaut as “dissonance acculturation” (Morenoff & Astor, 2006). One example is that 21st birthdays in Tonga have been changed to mimic American culture by celebrating 16th birthdays for girls. At times, this is not strictly due to the pressures of society or community. Tongan parents sometimes feel that to get ahead or to catch up to white American students, Tongan children should focus on learning English and should not speak Tongan. Because many Tongan permanent residents migrated at a young age, many will experience dissonance acculturation in their attempt to achieve the American Dream.

A study conducted by Zhou and Bankston (2006) revealed that young Vietnamese immigrants who were delinquent were more likely than non-delinquents to report piercing their noses, listening to rap music, watching TV, and “hanging out.” These youth were more detached from their native culture and more attracted to the American styles. This is a reflection of how youth conform to popular trends and the larger popular culture. The term “hanging out,” as explained by Zhou and Bankston, was believed by police to be gang related; gang members were
always hanging out. Zhou and Bankston concluded that problematic behavior in the Vietnamese immigrants they studied was more common among those who had become highly acculturated.

As Tongans acculturate in the U.S., much emphasis is placed on becoming American, blending in with the crowd, and conforming to the norms. The Tongan identity becomes a secondary identity in addition to being American. As Tongans have moved to the U.S. for employment and educational opportunities, these steps in assimilation can be perceived as success or attainment of goals that were set before reaching the U.S. However, it is a considerably different experience for Tongan deportees from the U.S., who must change course and become Tongan first and always. The resetting of a mentality that has lasted for many years poses a difficult hurdle for Tongan deportees. After years of trying to assimilate into American culture, deportees must face a new acculturation without the support of family, especially parents who might be familiar with Tongan culture.

This chapter was designed to introduce the topic of criminal deportation along with relevant policies that have affected deportations from the U.S. Additionally, this chapter was intended to provide a general overview of the effects of deportation on the individual being deported, as well as the effects on family members, particularly immediate family members who remain in the U.S. Studies that examine the experiences of deportees are limited; therefore, a section of this chapter was dedicated to discussing a few relevant and analogous deportation studies.

Many of the Tongan permanent residents in the U.S. migrated at a young age. Accordingly, a section in this chapter discussed the acculturation of Tongan Americans, as well as
several relevant sociocultural factors that affect acculturation in the U.S. and reintegration for Tongan Americans who have been deported to Tonga. Some of these factors include culture, shame, and religion. Examining how these factors play into reintegration experiences is just as important as examining the roles they play in the acculturation process in the U.S.

**Social Support**

The application of social support theory in criminology and criminal justice emphasizes services and support of communities, social networks, institutions, and individuals in addressing needs of released prisoner (Cullen, 1994; Woo et al., 2016). An effective reintegration process for inmates begins in the institution with programs designed to prepare prisoners for release, and continues through community based programs that include social services and mentoring relationships (Stohr, Walsh & Hemmens, 2013). The concurrent efforts of larger social networks, with individual level support such as family members and friends helps to provide a social support that aids individual’s deal with integration into the community (Colvin, Cullen, & Vander Ven, 2002).

Regardless of the evidence that social support has a positive effect on the lives of prisoners and their reentry experience, little research focuses on the social support of deportees in their home country. Deportees are a population that are likely to have more needs than others. Deportees are essentially released prisoners as they are being moved from a criminal justice facility to a different country, nonetheless, they are free in the community. Thus, the social support theory is applicable for deportees who are looking for sources of support when they are deported to Tonga.
Social support provision has been conceptualized in many ways, justly so, as deportees and prisoners are not a homogenous group. As deportees face challenges of reintegration, social support plays a huge role in adapting to a new community and after being released from prison with a traumatic experience (Pettus-Davis, 2014). Migrants who find social support and who are integrated into sociocultural groups in the community are less likely to commit crime (Finch & Vega, 2003). Social groups and institutions include the government, religion, and familial support.

Religion and culture are weaved together in Tonga. Therefore, religion can play a major role in providing social support and assisting in deportation reintegration. Research has found that individuals who attend religious services experience greater social support (Moxey, McEvoy, Bowe, & Attia, 2011). Moxey et al. (2011) also found that regardless of the church attendance frequency, participants in the study still reported to have better social support. The social support that religion provides is relevant to Tongan deportees because of the impossibility of defining Tongan culture without religion.

Besnier states, “Church affiliation operates as a major signifier of familial and personal identity. It is constitutive of people’s social and political positions, material conditions, life projects, presentation of self, and even body hexis” (Besnier, 2011, p. 208). He adds that social services are the responsibility of churches in Tonga. Social support is expected to be provided by church since it is a center of Tongan life. Tongans typically attend the Wesleyan, Mormon (LDS), or the Catholic churches.

Two organizations were created to assist deportees and their reintegration. The Ironman Ministry, founded by Sione Koloamatangi, a deportee from the U.S. focused on Christian
principles that encouraged bodybuilding (Pereira, 2011; Besnier, 2011). The second program, Foki ki ‘Api (Return to home) Reconnection program received support from the Free Wesleyan Church (Pereira, 2011). Both programs are now defunct, but they provide a picture of the kind of attention and support given to deportees by religious groups in the past, as well as the projected path churches can take to assist their deported members.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

There are many advantages to applying qualitative approaches. Qualitative research focuses on meanings, concepts, and defining characteristics of people, events, interactions, and experience (Tewksbury, 2009). Although they are less used in criminal justice research, qualitative methods provide valuable insights into the contexts of certain situations, and can elicit “true understandings of the social aspects of how crime occurs and how the agents, structures and processes of responding to crime operate in culturally-grounded contexts” (Tewksbury, 2009, p. 39). The value of the insights provided by qualitative methods cannot be overstated, especially for generating and advancing knowledge in the criminal justice field. A qualitative approach to studying deportee experiences is significant because it can provide an in-depth understanding of issues that is not possible through quantitative methods. This study employs a qualitative method because of its suitability for understanding and exploring the experiences of deportees in Tonga; a qualitative methodology, especially a phenomenological approach, allows for the subject of the research to reveal perceptions and lived experiences that are not yet documented in the literature (Dew, 2007). Moreover, Tongans have traditionally passed down stories, histories, and traditions through oral methods for centuries.

Research Questions. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the experiences deportees have when forced to live in a different society. This study aims to explore how people who have been deported from the U.S. to Tonga make sense of being deported.
Exploring how individual deportees experience this event will shed light on the challenges they face and possible solutions. Specifically, this study aims to explore these research questions:

1. How do Tongan deportees experience the process of deportation?
2. What factors obstruct and assist deportees in their reintegration?

The responses to these questions will illuminate the subjective experiences of Tongan deportees transitioning and reintegrating into a “home” country that is not quite home to them. The first research question is broad and a starting point to allow participants to share their personal experience from their perspective. The second question aims to discover the factors that influence the reintegration experience. The research questions are designed to illuminate the stories of deportees and bring to light the cultural, religious, and community influences.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

To address the research questions, this qualitative study will use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the experiences of Tongan-American deportees. IPA is a qualitative method that explores individuals’ experiences and perceptions of objects or events. In recent years, this approach has become increasingly popular in research to illuminate subjects’ perspectives and how they make sense of their experiences (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). According to J. A. Smith and Osborn (2002), there are no definitive theories nor predetermined hypothesis in IPA. This research will allow the participating deportees to frame the study.

J. A. Smith et al. (2009) explain that IPA draws on three traditional theoretical foundations: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. The phenomenological approach to IPA provides foundational tools for making interpretations of people’s lived experiences (J. A.
Smith et al., 2009; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2004; Thompson & Zahavi, 2007). The hermeneutics approach helps to “reveal the uniqueness of shared meanings and common practices that can inform the way we think” (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p. 263). The third approach is ideography, which is concerned with the particular; ideography emphasizes the commitment to the particular, and thus highlights the importance of the depth of analysis and also the importance of understanding how particular events have been understood from the perspectives of particular people (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). An advantage of using an approach such as IPA is that it gives the researcher and the participant the flexibility to balance the methods and research concepts with being culturally sensitive to how knowledge is shared and passed.

**Research Design**

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify the deportees’ individual perceptions and experiences of their deportation to Tonga. Interviewing deportees helped ascertain personal experiences and was advantageous for discussing sensitive issues (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are also similar to indigenous methods of storytelling, or *talanoa*.

*Talanoa* is a general Tongan term for people engaging in conversation (‘Otunuku, 2011). As an indigenous research methodology, it emphasizes the rich cultural tradition of sharing knowledge, particularly the lived experiences of individuals (Picton, Horsley, & Knight, 2016; Vaioleti, 2013). It is parallel to IPA in that it focuses on the interests of the participants. As a method, it corresponds appropriately with semi-structured interviews. People of the Pacific, including Tongans, are tired of surveys (Tecun, Hafoka, ‘Ulu’ave, & ‘Ulu’ave-Hafoka, 2018;
Vaioleti, 2006). Tongans prefer *talanoa*, as it is a natural method compared to the foreign method of surveys. Surveys do not allow the researcher and participant to build a relationship and do not allow much opportunity for the space between two individuals to be cultivated or nourished, as suggested by the concept of *tauhi va*.

Semi-structured interviews permitted deportees in this study to express their feelings and to tell their own stories in ways that are more effective than surveys or other means. Interviewing deportees was not only beneficial in terms of cultural relevancy, but also acted as an event that facilitated the topics that would be discussed, setting up the research question to be answered via analysis (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Although semi-structured interviews were utilized in this study, understanding *talanoa* assisted in understanding and overcoming social and cultural barriers.

The interviews with deportees were voice recorded after consent was granted and a location was selected. Interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours and were conducted in English and Tongan. In instances where the interview was conducted in Tongan, the transcript was translated into English for analysis. Back translation was used, which translated from Tongan to English and then from English to Tongan to determine to what extent the translation may have changed the interpretation of what was said. Using this technique helped to ensure the perceptions and experiences of deportation were not corrupted because of language translations. Back translation is a common practice in international and comparative research (Brislin, 1970).
Interview guide. An interview guide was used to facilitate the discussion and enabled the participants to open up and provide an account of their experience. The questions in this guide were broad, open, and expansive so as to invite the participants to talk at length. The guide was not followed precisely; questions were redrafted, added, and dropped throughout each interview as deemed necessary and beneficial for the study. Having an interview guide made it possible to ask probing and follow-up questions reliant on the initial responses, which allowed me to dig deeper into significant areas of the interview.

The interview guide is found in Appendix A. The bulk of the discussions hung on three main topics: the deportation process and experiences of being incarcerated and deported back to Tonga; facing acculturation issues and reintegrating into an unfamiliar place; and dealing with the stigma and shame of being deported while experiencing it in a foreign “home.” These main topics covered the two research questions.

The first topic invited participants to discuss the process of being in the U.S. and then either being deported directly from a holding facility or institution, or being picked up from home by authorities and placed in a holding facility awaiting deportation. The second topic addressed both research questions by engaging participants on the topics of culture, how culture is passed down in the U.S., and how things differ in Tonga. The participants had been away from Tonga for some time, and discussing reintegration led to a discussion of their knowledge of Tongan culture and language when they first arrived in the islands. The last topic, stigma and shame, is related to the continuity of a deportation sentence that essentially does not end. The label and stereotypes of being a deportee remain attached to an individual even after years of being
deported. The questions regarding this topic invited participants to discuss the stereotypes they were aware of as well as the shame they experienced. Follow-up and prompted questions from the last topic also invited participants to talk about Tonga as their new home.

Because these were semi-structured interviews and related to *talanoa* sessions, the fluidity and direction of the interviews were mostly dictated by the participants. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to share experiences that they were comfortable with, which allowed me to identify which topics were more important to participants.

**Research sample and strategy.** To participate in this study, subjects must have been deported to Tonga as a consequence of criminal convictions. This did not include individuals who overstayed their visas, refugees and asylum seekers, or those who entered without inspection. Furthermore, participants had to be at least 18 years of age.

Having been to Tonga on several occasions, I established many informal connections throughout the country. Personally knowing a deportee was of great assistance in meeting new deportees, making connections within deportee circles, and finding opportunities to share the purpose of my study and gain deportees’ confidence.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling with identified deportees, as well as through associates in Tonga who had contact and interaction with deportees. Through my visits to Tonga, I was able to establish connections with several people involved with services for deportees who had known and strong connections to deportees. In coordination with these associates, I requested the participation of deportees through personal contact, phone, or social media (Facebook). These methods were used due to the distance between me and the
prospective participants as well as time and cost limitations. These forms of communication were also parallel to types of communications used by these individuals in the U.S. before deportation. Facebook was a valuable source of communication, as it allowed potential participants to view my profile, see pictures, and view different content before meeting in person. It also provided an opportunity for potential participants to establish a hohoko, a connection, through communication or by identifying mutual friends or people on my Facebook page. Contact through phone was a possibility, both while in the U.S. and in Tonga. I preferred texting and phone calls over Facebook while in Tonga, due to the expensive cost of data usage. Phone calls and texts while I remained in the U.S. were limited due to the costs of international calls and texting.

The study population was estimated to consist of several hundred deportees now residing in Tonga. Pereira (2010) reported that roughly 358 individuals were deported to Tonga from the United States between 1998 and 2008. Additionally, the United States deported 189 individuals as a consequence of criminal convictions between 2009 and 2017 (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2012, 2016, 2017). These deportees may live on any of the 150 inhabited islands of Tonga; however, the majority currently live on the islands of Tongatapu, Ha’apai, and Vava’u, which contain 95% of the nation’s population. These official numbers are reported from the United States; obtaining the exact number of deportees from the Tongan government was difficult, as agencies have been deficient in their reporting. Nevertheless, the Tongan society is cohesive and communitarian and can identify deportees in their respective villages.

The aim was to interview deportees until saturation of information was reached. Past IPA studies used a homogenous sample, which is expected where research subjects are selected
based on their relevance to the research question and the topic. This study examined Tongans who were deported to Tonga because of criminal convictions, so homogeneity among this sample naturally existed because of their relevance to the topic and because of the small number of willing participants.

J. A. Smith et al. (2009) claimed that there is no specific number for sample size. This number depends on several factors, including the commitment to the analysis of each case, the richness of each case, and the constraints of the study. J. A. Smith et al. recommended that student projects using IPA have a sample size between three and six, lest the researcher become overwhelmed by the amount of data collected. Back, Gustafsson, Larsson, and Berterö (2011) reviewed past IPA studies and found their sample sizes to be between 5 and 25 informants; in their IPA study on sexual abuse, they interviewed 10 children. McManus (2010) conducted an IPA study on officer experiences in therapeutic prisons with a sample size of eight. Fukushima (2012) recruited eight participants for an IPA study on hikikomori, a Japanese term for a condition where people lock themselves away and stop going to school or work. These studies examined people who had gone through a specific shared experience.

Building rapport with contacts. Some deportees felt hesitant to discuss their past with a researcher they did not know personally. However, with the assistance of my connections, I felt confident that I would have the chance to interview a sufficient number of willing deportees.

The importance of relationships is foundational in the Tongan culture, and this can open up access to deportees and their stories. The Tongan concept of tauhi va helps to understand human relationships as well as the role they play in reaching understanding and knowledge. Ka’ili
(2005) pointed out that *tauhi va* is “the Tongan value and practice of keeping good relations with kin and friends. It is also thought of as a commitment to sustain harmonious social relations with kin and kin-like members” (p. 92). Building relationships of trust with a deportee and two Tongans who were highly respected was foundational in recruiting deportees to participate in this study. Deportees who knew these three contacts agreed to participate based on their relationship with one of them, without having to meet with me.

‘Otunuku (2011) suggested observing the Tongan concept of *fe’ilongaki* or meaningful engagement when conducting research among Tongans. *Fe’ilongaki* upon meeting subjects establishes a connection and enhances the engagement between the researcher and the subject. ‘Otunuku (2011) explained, “Because he needed to connect to his participants on a personal level, he first introduced himself by reciting his genealogy and heritage; his professional identity as a teacher and a university student came later” (p. 48). This process allows for a cultural connection to be established before the interview takes place. It also warrants that honest information will be shared and collected.

Connecting on a personal level with deportees is important when developing an emphasis on understanding deportees in their own context. *Fe’ilongaki* opens up an opportunity to introduce family genealogy at the beginning stages. This action is important because reciting genealogy weaves together connections with other Tongans. As stated by Ka’ili (2005), “identities of Tongans are determined by their genealogical connections to their *fonua* (land) and to their *kainga* (kin members)” (p. 91).
Understanding genealogy and family background is an essential part of building any type of relationship in Tongan society, especially a relationship of trust. Because my family is not royal or noble, I initially perceived difficulty gaining the initial trust of those with such status. However, as a commoner, I was able to build relationships of trust because of the background of farming and the hard work associated with it, which was an advantage. In response to this, I ensured the cooperation of the three aforementioned contacts to assist in recruiting the participation of deportees.

My status as a commoner did not affect the relationships I was able to build. One advantage I had as a researcher was being able to speak the Tongan language. Speaking Tongan plays a big role in identity among Tongans, as they feel that maintaining culture is an important aspect of being Tongan. As an American citizen, the fastest way for me to show humility was to present myself as an equal and not degrade deportees. Having friends who had been deported played a big part in how the rest of the deportees perceived me. Because the deportees spoke English, it was important to show that I could be Tongan and American and balance when to express either one.

Before each interview began, I spent 10-30 minutes formally introducing myself by reciting my genealogy and the villages my family comes from. This helped to establish a hohoko, or a connection, with each participant. Culturally, Tongans share histories when meeting each other to see if they have any connections or mutual acquaintances. This was relevant to establishing a rapport that would ensure clean and honest data. Several connections were made with interviews that included blood relatives, mutual friends in the U.S., and coming from the
same village. Making these connections seemed to relax the mood of two strangers meeting for the first time. Soon after the interview, personal contact outside of the researcher/participant dynamic was established with the exchanging of phone numbers, emails, and social media friend requests. This signified a continual relationship, with both sides having a responsibility to nurture the space in between.

Inquiring about the deportation process helped to break ground and lay the first stone of the interview session. This allowed the participants to discuss their experience of deportation from the beginning. Starting here was beneficial because it skipped over the criminal activity; the participants felt comfortable recalling the past without having to describe the crimes they had committed. Open-ended questions were asked to encourage engagement. Because the deportation process can begin without warning (Brisbois et al., 2016), steps were taken to safeguard the sensitivity of the subjects.

The deportees who consented to the study were informed of the layout of interviews. They were also aware that the study results could take many months to collect and analyze, and that the reports would be shared with those involved in the study. The deportees were assumed to be struggling with obtaining jobs or gaining respect in the community, and exploring these issues helped deportees realize that there could be future implications that could assist this small but special population.

This population has not been studied in depth. Therefore, the results of this study will contribute to multiple fields, including criminology, sociology, and psychology, because it sheds light on shared and individual experiences of deportation, reintegration, acculturation and
stigma. Policy makers and academics will also benefit from the findings of this study, as it can provide information on needs of deportees and how they can be addressed. The conclusions from this study can be used as a guideline for deportees in the future, to examine and learn from the experiences of individuals who went through the deportation process and were reintegrating into Tongan society; as a goal, this project aims to inform Tongan youth who will be deported in the future that they are not alone in the deportation and reintegration process.

**Analytical Plan**

Upon completion of the interviews, the voice recordings were transcribed completely in the U.S. In instances where Tongan was used, it was translated into English. Personal identifiers were removed, including names and places. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identities of participants.

The transcriptions were analyzed using Nvivo 12 Plus qualitative analysis software, which helped to identify beliefs and constructs that emerged from the interview while trying to overlook the frequency of concept or thought lest the meanings be missed in the analysis. Nvivo allowed for annotations and comments to be created to note possible themes that were developing. These annotations included comments on similarities, differences, echoes, amplifications, contradictions, and concepts, as described by J. A. Smith and Osborn (2004). The notes and commentary developed into themes as the analysis progressed. As each emergent theme was identified in Nvivo, the next step was to connect themes. As these themes emerged, they were checked in the transcript to make sure they were connected. This occurred often throughout the process to maintain a close interaction with the text.
An ordered table of themes was constructed, and they were placed in chronological order or marked according to when in the interview they were discussed. These themes made different clusters, and these clusters were labeled according to relevant topics. Nvivo software has functions that can create these clusters, as well as identify and mark where in the transcriptions each one was found. Also, in this stage, as global and superordinate themes were identified, themes that did not fit in or were not developing were dropped. I started with case one and continued through this process, then moved on to the next case to identify which themes emerged after constructing the list of cluster themes. This approach allowed me to go through each case while observing the cluster list developing.

To illustrate the process by which I extricated themes, I will provide an example of the thematic analysis.

Interviewer: What are some of the thoughts you had in your mind as you are flying back to Tonga? What were some of your concerns or worries about on the way here?

“Hiva”: I was scared. I was worried about, about what am I going to do. How am I going to make my living? How am I going to make money? I didn’t know what to expect, because I fell from the church for a while, so I kind of, it was really, really hard for me to adapt. When I came back I didn’t have my luggage, so all my, everything was lost. So I kind of felt like, that, I was lost, you know. Like a lost sheep, even though I was coming back to my “home.” Nobody was at the airport, so I suto [hitchhiked] with one of my friends that I met at the airplane, and kind of stayed with him when I stayed here.
Initial analysis of this conversation revealed feelings of fear and concern about the challenges of adapting in Tonga as a deportee. Hiva also expressed concern about not maintaining a strong dedication to religion and not being familiar with anything or anyone in Tonga.

After all of the cases were analyzed with the assistance of Nvivo, themes were naturally organized by topics, and analysis of the organizing themes produced several superordinate and global themes. The global themes that developed from this conversation with Hiva included access to jobs, religion as a coping mechanism, feeling foreign in a place that is “home,” and negotiating new spaces.

The final step in the analysis was the write-up, which is discussed in Chapter V. This stage outlined the meanings inherent in the participants’ experience (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2004). The identified themes were explained in detail, and much attention was placed on distinguishing what the participants said and my interpretation of what they said. The superordinate themes were discussed in detail along with policy recommendations.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how deportees experience reintegration in Tonga and how they make meaning of their transitional experience, utilizing an IPA approach. Several superordinate themes emerged through the analysis of interviews with deportees to Tonga that highlighted important aspects of their reintegration. All participants in this study mentioned these aspects of their reintegration experience in the interviews.

There were 12 participants who fit the criteria of being Tongans who were deported back to Tonga after a criminal conviction abroad. Though the initial criteria included deportees from Australia, New Zealand, and other countries that have deported Tongans, the participants were all deportees from the U.S. There were two main reasons for this: (a) aligned with the literature, the majority of Tongan deportees are returned from the U.S. (Pereira, 2012); and (b) using a snowball sampling method, it is understandable for U.S. deported Tongans to refer and connect with others who lived in the U.S.

Recruitment Process Revisited

Over 20 deportees initially expressed interest in this study. However, only 12 participants accepted the invitation to be interviewed and voice recorded. Interview locations included the participant’s home, the participant’s church, downtown Nuku’alofa (the nation’s capital), and a church’s social services office. All locations were determined by the participant and the associate involved in the recruitment. As noted in Figure 4, Akataha was an associate and a deportee who
helped in recruiting one more deportee for the study. Taina and Verna were associates and contacts that I made before I started to recruit. Taina assisted in recruiting Fua, Tapu, and Misi for the study by informing them of the research topic and then exchanging phone numbers so that I could contact them directly. Verna assisted in recruiting seven deportees to participate in this study: Kuta, Vaka, Ngata, Mohokoi, Hiva, Faumalila, and Fehi. Consistent with the literature on deportation, locating and recruiting women for the study was difficult, but two of the participants were female.

The interviews took place in Tonga in the summers of 2015 and 2017. After interviewing five deportees in the summer of 2015, I realized I had not reached saturation of knowledge. I returned to Tonga in the summer of 2017 and completed seven additional interviews. After an examination of the interviews, I was confident that I had reached saturation with the 12 completed interviews.

The participants consisted of 10 male deportees and 2 female deportees. No information was collected on the crimes for which the study participants were convicted and consequently deported, because it was believed that the sensitivity of the topic and reliving events that caused their deportation might dissuade individuals from participating. After the conclusion of Tapu’s interview, he revealed that he was happy and opened up in the interview because I was not so focused on the crime that he had committed so many years ago. This was reassurance that the path I was taking was the most beneficial for this study.
Figure 4. Recruitment of deportees for this study. Deportees are circled in red. Number of years spent in the U.S. before deportation is indicated in each deportee circle.
**Saturation Revisited**

The number of participating deportees was contingent on the saturation of knowledge. This guiding principle of saturation establishes the point at which the information collected begins to repeat itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hennink et al., 2010). Data saturation and theoretical saturation are the two types of saturation used in qualitative research (Morse, 2005; Walker, 2012). The purpose of this current study was to explore participants’ experiences of the deportation phenomenon and get a better understanding of what the experiences involved. Theoretical saturation determined when to stop the interviews. Theoretical saturation occurs when new or additional information does not lead to any new emerging themes (Given, 2016).

Based on the aforementioned criteria, interviews ceased when the interviews were not producing new emerging themes in the codebook and became repetitious. The IPA framework involves analysis after each interview to determine the emerging themes as well as the saturation of knowledge. At one point in the interview stage, there was a gap of 2 years. Five interviews were completed in the summer of 2015, but after they were analyzed, it was evident that saturation was not achieved, because new themes emerged after each interview. Thus, another trip was made to Tonga and the last seven interviews were completed. In the last few interviews, it was evident that no new themes were emerging and a repetition of themes started to develop. This was obvious when analyzing and coding the last two interviews. In these particular interviews, no new codes were created, and data were easily designated to fall under an existing code. It was at this point that saturation was achieved, according to the criteria identified above.
The study participant profiles displayed in Table 1 highlight several key deportee characteristics. For all participants, this table presents gender, age of immigration to the U.S., age
when deported to Tonga, year of deportation, and whether they had children in the U.S. The purpose of this table is to give basic information of participating deportees.

Only two women participated in the current study. Supported by the literature (Coutin, 2013), there are far fewer female deportees than male. Furthermore, women experience a different stigma than men, making it challenging to successfully recruit female deportees to participate in studies. However, the two women who participated shared great insights into the experiences of female deportees.

As noted in Table 1, the ages at which the deportees migrated to the U.S. are striking. On average, these Tongan deportees migrated to the U.S. when they were 4 years old. In previous deportee studies, Salvadoran deportees migrated to the U.S. at an average age of 10 (Coutin, 2013) and Jamaican deportees migrated to the U.S. at an average age of 23 (Golash-Boza, 2014). Acculturation and assimilation for deportees are influenced at a young age, as discussed below. Also related to the acculturation of Tongans in the U.S. is the time spent living in the U.S. before deportation. The range of 13 to 52 years is a large symptom of the difficulties deportees face in reintegration. At the shortest, 13 years is still a long time, considering the average age of migration and the acculturation that occurs during that time. On the other end, Vaka spent 52 years in the U.S. before being deported back to Tonga. He had not visited Tonga once since he left, and reintegrating as a deportee became a huge challenge for Vaka.

The last column indicates whether the deportees had children in the U.S. Ten of the participating deportees reported at least one child in the U.S., and all deportees reported being
separated from parents, siblings, and other relatives. The separation of families is currently a contentious topic in the U.S., especially concerning Latinx migrants and the southern border.

**Positive Reintegration Factors**

The experiences of participating deportees were unique in many ways. However, as themes emerged, it was evident how much the experiences of deportees were also similar and shared. This section is dedicated to the unique and shared experiences of deportees that supported the reintegration of these individuals into Tongan society. The positive factors that aided in reintegration included features such as family, religion, and being familiar with the Tongan culture.

**Family.** It is no surprise that all participants in this study mentioned and discussed their families in one way or another. The family is one of the most important units and key to understanding one’s place in Tongan society (Gifford, 1971). It is within the family that Tongans learn and connect with their motherland, especially for Tongans living abroad. The family networks can expand to several branches and generations of a consanguineous family (Hafoka et al., 2013).

In their interviews, the participants shared experiences of being supported by family after their arrival in Tonga, as well as support from family in the U.S. There were several different ways in which families were able to support their deported family members. Some deportees received support from their families throughout the deportation process when family members visited the federal facilities while they were detained. One deportee, Akataha, spoke about how his father supported him by paying for a lawyer who would help to fight his case: “Only your family
will be there. Just my dad, Kaho ... they went try go get me a lawyer, try find a way for me to get release over there [U.S.].” Although he knew his case was serious, it was evident that he was thankful that his father was doing all he could to fight his case.

Ngata was comforted to find that he had a brother in Tonga, whom he was able to track down a few days after arriving in Tonga. One of the pronounced means of support for people in Tonga is remittances, which globally ranges between $100 and $200 billion annually from migrant remitters (Ellermann, 2008). This is the second largest capital flow to developing countries after foreign direct involvement, and disrupting this process interferes with family life. Families that are accustomed to receiving financial assistance from abroad are then cut off from that support, which was vital to their well-being. That loss of support is a result of remitters being deported, losing a job, or not being able to afford to send remittances. Though remittances are usually sent by working family members in the U.S. and abroad, Ngata received his cash remittances from his son: “My son had wired me some money so it was all good. He wired me $2,000 or something …”

Cash remittances are very important and a huge support for many Tongan families. In a study by Hagan et al. (2008), researchers reported that 72% of study deportees were remitters. In this current study, only a few participating deportees mentioned receiving remittances from family members in the U.S. In a study used by Leeves (2009), 60% of households in Tonga who participated in the study had at least one migrant member. Leeves’s research supported the concept that traditional gift-giving was practiced through remittances and strengthened family networks. Ngata’s transnational relationships were strengthened through the remittances he received to help his transition to Tonga. The remittances also assisted in carrying out cultural
duties to family, village, or church. These duties included representing his family and providing gifts at important functions such as funerals, weddings, and births.

Since the beginning of the Tongan migration abroad, remittances in the form of money have maintained healthy transnational relationships (Evans, Harms, & Reid, 2009). This system of reciprocity has cultivated and strengthened bonds between Tongan Americans and their kin on the islands, but most importantly, it has been critical for the Tongan economy (Wallis, 2010). Though their families may have participated in sending remittances, deportees are reportedly not on the receiving end of remittances as much as the other Tongans in the community. This may point to the lack of second and third generation Tongans in the U.S. who may not continue the transnational connection of sending remittances.

Support, especially from family, is not always accepted by deportees. As Hiva shared some of his experiences with other deportees, he expressed that support was necessary for a successful reintegration, but not all deportees were willing to receive the help:

Sometimes they won’t speak it in words but its because it’s all in the heart, all in the... I think that’s the biggest struggle. It’s unseen. It’s the unseen. I think that’s something to take into account, you know. Sometimes they put that smile on their face but deep, deep inside it’s all broken and shattered. It’s become, you know, they’re trying to put the pieces back together and not knowing how it’s going to fit, how it’s going, I think another piece that I want to share as well is, the support part. The support part is the big, big, big. That will play a big role trying to piece these guys together. Because these are men, and these men don’t want to, they’re fragile. They don’t want to look like they need to be pieced
together. But deep inside they do, you know. They got to admit to it, and if they don’t admit to it it’s going to go the hard way.

Hiva used the word “unseen” to describe the struggles that deportees faced. They were accustomed to hiding their true feelings, but they truly were in need of assistance.

For some deportees, like Misi, family support came by way of phone calls or visits:

Biggest support, it was, even though I had contacted my families, through the phone and some visits that was probably the only support. And that’s not even, that’s not even, whatever support they give us, you just have to take it and use it the best way you can.

Misi was appreciative of any type of support he could get from his family. By visiting or calling Misi on the phone, Misi’s family was able to maintain a strong relationship, and this provided Misi with emotional support. He sought the advice of his father upon learning that he would be deported to Tonga. His father had land in Tonga, and encouraged Misi to take his land and learn to farm to provide for himself. Having land is one of the greatest supports for deportees, who then have a connection to the land.

Land is patrilineal, usually passing from father to the eldest son (Crawford, 2001). For centuries land was used for subsistence farming, providing an opportunity for a married man to provide food for his family (Beaglehole & Beaglehole, 1941). All men are eligible to receive an 8.25 acre piece of land when they turn 16 years of age (Crawford, 2001). However, with population growing through the years and less land available, it has become a challenge in ensuring that all men will receive a piece of land. Thus for Misi, it has become an advantage because not many others, especially deportees, have an allotted piece of land.
Religion. The discussion of religion by all participants in this study further supports the difficulty of defining Tongan culture without including considering religion. Several participants shared how being accepted into a church and being fellowshipped into a group helped them to feel acknowledged as human beings. Others shared how religion assisted in their repentance, remorse, and penitence. These emotions and states of mind motivated deportees to accept their deportation and make positive personal changes in their lives. Though all participating deportees mentioned religion in some way, they did not all discuss its positive influence on their reintegration.

Social support and acceptance through church. The social ties formed among congregants of a church are an important source of social support (Merino, 2014). Religion is a large part of the Tongan culture, but is also a transnational mechanism, as many of the participants grew up in Tongan-speaking churches in the U.S. Because Tongans mainly migrated to large inner-cities where Tongan communities are established, there were many opportunities in the large cities to attend church services held in Tongan (Small, 1997). A few mentioned seeking out a church in the early days after their arrival in Tonga. Ngata shared:

It was easy to find a church that spoke English. I think that was the easiest part for me. I think back, that was. Because on my second Sunday here, for the first two weeks, you know, where do we go? What do we do? We’re staying over here spending money with this family, going with this family. Going over to my brother’s family, spending money up there. And money is slowly getting depleted. And then one morning I said, man, just like back in the States, I gotta go to church, you know what I mean?
Ngata sought out a church in his second week after arriving in Tonga. He also mentioned the effortlessness of not only finding a place to worship, but locating an English congregation in his religion. Going to church in Tonga reminded him of his church attendance back in the U.S. Transnational practices for deported Tongans, such as going to church, are pertinent to their reintegration, as they are restricted from travel to the U.S. As posited by Golash-Boza (2014), deportees utilize transnational practices as coping strategies in dealing with their reintegration hardships. Unsurprisingly, all the deportees in this study mentioned religion as important in their lives, and the majority reminisced about going to church in the U.S.

In addition to being a coping mechanism, religion also plays a role in providing a social support system for deportees. With a transnational connection made through finding the same religion in Tonga, links developed between the deportees and the local congregants of their churches. In his experience, Mohokoi found a supportive group in the local Mormon congregation. He shared his advice to any deportee:

My advice is to keep God first in their life. That’s my biggest advice to all of them. If you do, if you keep God in your life everything will work out, you know. People will come your way that are needed to help you, you know. That’s the honest truth on that, and just to do good.

As Mohokoi shared his connection with other people through religion, Tapu articulated his connection to his congregation and his church through his progenitors. His grandfathers were influential in establishing his religion in their various villages:
I also think for me, me for myself, I was lucky because my grandfather worked in government for years, but then, my grandfather, he was a pioneer in the church here. So everywhere I went, people go, “Oh, so-and-so’s grandson,” and so both of my families, my great-grandfather on my mom’s side and my grandfather on my dad’s side. They were pretty much pioneers, and they are the ones in those church history books, and like, so people knew me from that, which I am lucky and grateful for. And also that my grandfather worked in the government for years, and even my dad’s family now. I kind of have advantage because of them.

His connection with people in Tonga because of his grandparents and their legacy gave Tapu an advantage. Tapu understood that these connections with local Tongans were integral to his reintegration and acceptance into the church and into their community.

Without the connections that Tapu alluded to, it can take some time and effort for deportees to break the walls of local groups or congregations and be accepted into their circles. The deportees in this study seemed to easily and naturally make connections with other deportees. As they struggled to make more connections with religious groups and people, they continued to fight the stigma of continuing criminal behavior:

I mean, they think we are all drug dealers, we all have something to do with the underworld, you know. Because some of them do, but because we know each other and hang around each other, they think that we all on the same page, you know. But we just hang around each other because that’s all we have, you know. And then, at the same time
we beginning to know more people and with church people, we hanging around church people at the same time. But first all we had was each other, you know.

When deportees are accepted into religious circles, the support is sympathetic and reassuring for many. Fehi spoke about the importance of having a connection to a church group when arriving in Tonga. On the topic of institutions that could assist deportees in Tonga, he stated:

I think the church. Churches, religion. I think they should know more about it [deportation]. If the government is not going to do anything, at least know the background of this person in a sense, contact the president of the Methodist church there or the organization where somebody is over there to welcome, just in case there is nobody there [at the airport]. Or at least ask someone from the LDS, at least send a couple missionary or somebody in the church that can be there. Just to look over things and make sure everything is all right. If the government is not going to do anything about it, or at least give them an option. Give them that option or probably talk to them before they get shipped down, you know, asking them their church, is anyone picking you up at the airport or who you going to stay with, at least something like that.

Fehi identified two paramount means of assisting deportees in Tonga: first, a connection with members or clergy of their religious affiliation, and second, the early involvement of an institution in their lives. Even for those deportees who were not as active in Sunday attendance of church, the church they affiliated with in the U.S. remained as a source of support. Fehi continued:
I think that’s what most of us out here that have been deported and stuff, if we were inactive in the church back in the States, it’s uh, here you got an opportunity. I’m always happy cuz a lot of them have that chance to become something in their ward or their [congregation]. That’s the biggest thing I see, that and family out here.

Ngata, agreeing with Fehi, perceived that threats to reintegration in Tonga could be countered by going to church:

What’s the first thing you going to do? Drink, smoke, and girls. The three negatives that’s going to pull you away from religion. My advice is, be smart. Find religion, man. Whether you want to or not, you know what I mean? Then people always look at church, you know. What’s church? You know what I mean? Here in Tonga, church will help you find your sanity. It’s the only person that will be there and help support.

Going to church, for some deportees, provides the social support they need to make changes in their lives. Fua found that fellow church members helped keep him in line by not allowing him to make bad decisions. He shared an experience of wanting to go to a party and being stopped by fellow church members:

I’ll attend anything, whether I’m invited or not. I go because I want to see what it’s like, I want to see what that’s about, the only barrier about that is money, the funds, whether I wanted to go to a boat party because I know the tickets or the money is too much, of course I would buy my way in if I was still selling drugs. I [can’t] buy my way in because I’m doing this whole 360 turn to turn my life around, so I don’t see that as an option, I rather not go and attend anything else though but church and everything, I’m doing my
life to God. If anything that would stop me, is church members, they would stop me because, I guess, I don’t know, it’s a part of their courage or the church code.

Responsibilities, callings in church service, and running errands for the church can give deportees a feeling of accountability and acceptance. Misi, who at the time of his interview held a high responsibility and calling in his church, experienced the stigma attached to being a deportee:

I think they kind of, they look down. They, yeah I do. I think they stigmatize people that are sent back. As in, probably, for example, church. I think they stigmatize people there. They think we are not worthy enough, or they just, they don’t think we can carry out our callings in church. For example, to become a leader or something. I couldn’t say how much. But it does, it’s, there is a factor there.

Hiva described his experience with his church responsibilities and how that inspired and encouraged him in his work:

So I’m more confident, even though people know me, that I was deported, but they kind of have that respect for me. They don’t ... call me a deportee or whatever. So they kind of have that, sort of respect for me. And I have four callings in the [church], you know. I’m doing pretty good, I guess you can say. I’m very, very confident in what I do now. So on my way now, I’m trying to find the strength in me, I want to be an entrepreneur.

The confidence that Hiva had gained was exemplified in his new endeavors to be an entrepreneur in addition to his current employment. Having four different responsibilities also demonstrated his acceptance and social approval to hold those responsibilities despite being a deportee.
**Spiritual changes.** Deportees also expressed their penitence and remorse for the actions that led to their deportation. Many who turned to religion for support shared their spiritual development and how it led to better reintegration and positive changes. Faith and spiritual change are not new avenues for released prisoners on track to reintegration. In Tonga, religion is connected with the culture, and thus, permeates all aspects of life. As mentioned above, the institutional aspect of religion can provide much needed social and moral support. Faith and spirituality’s relation to deportees’ reintegration lies in the development of religious intrapersonal growth.

Religious involvement leads to learned prosocial behaviors, which can instill a greater sense of empathy toward others and decrease the likelihood of committing deviant and harmful acts (B. Johnson, 2009). It is possible that through religious activity, individuals can be steered away from potential criminal career paths (B. Johnson, 2009). Deportees carry the responsibility of intrapersonal commitment to spirituality for the benefit of their reintegration. All deportees were convicted of a crime and consequently deported to Tonga. For many deportees, a spiritual change is a personal charge outside the scope of institutional and social agencies that highlights a pathway to integration.

Kuta struggled immeasurably with coping through the experience of being deported to Tonga. According to Kuta and other deportees, a few young men who struggled with deportation in Tonga had committed suicide. Crying, Kuta shared:

It’s [deportation] something you wouldn’t want to wish on anybody. It’s like, it’s like living in a nightmare, and not a nightmare at the same time. You know what I mean? We can’t
be free but at the same time, can’t cope with their way of life ... I’m just glad because of my belief in the church, I am not weak in my spirit to where these things can tear me down, but I can easily see why a lot of boys have already committed suicide coming to Tonga.

Kuta understood why the experience of being deported could be so difficult to bear. By relying on her spiritual strength, Kuta did not allow the struggles to get to her.

Faumalila knew well the struggle he had in his early years as a deportee in Tonga:

When I first got here, man, that’s all I want to do is party. Get drunk and stuff. But then 2004 I got back on my feet, it’s what time it was. Got to church, got married, sealed with my family in the temple, been tokoni pisope [bishop’s counselor] twice now. Currently first counselor to the bishop right now, I mean it’s been good.

Faumalila was able to make changes in his life that allowed him to grow spiritually. This also led to the multiple church responsibilities he had carried in the past several years. These important changes in Faumalia’s life marked a significant transformation from the individual that he was before deportation.

Misi had a similar experience, observing the changes he made to go back to church and the blessings he received from those choices:

With my family, and my wife’s family, I think they did stigmatize. Different perceptions. They didn’t think our marriage would last. They knew, because I got here in ’99, I met her first month and we got married on November of ’99. But through the first months of marriage, I was not active in the church. I was still smoking and drinking. I still, and
everybody thought that, but at the same time I wanted [to change] myself not only for myself but for our family.

Members of the LDS faith serve 2-year missions where they are focused on proselytizing and have little communication with their families. Hiva was one of two deportees who served a mission for the LDS church, and he elaborated on how the mission was able to help him in adapting to the Tongan culture and lifestyle. He called the mission a “game changer” and a “life changer” that guided him away from the party scene. Personal accountability for making personal efforts to make spiritual changes led Hiva to a pathway of reintegration. He shared:

I struggled, you know, because there wasn’t really much support from my mom and back home, because we kind of ran into a lot of issues. So they kind of labeled me as, well. I’m kind of like, I was here all alone. I didn’t have family, I wasn’t married, nothing. Nothing going. But, I think just deep inside, a little light was still on, I guess. And I’m so glad that I did went on my mission, because, if you can see the turnaround that that had on my life.

Vaka had spent many years doing drugs. It wasn’t until he was deported and his brother helped him get back to church that he was able to find stability in Tonga:

I avoided the party scene, the nightclubs. Because when I came back, you know, we’re Mormon, so I went to church with my brother. Started going to the temple. I had been to the temple for my first time back in ’98, but I fell off that. But I been drinking and using ever since I was a kid. I ran away from home because of father abuse, hitting me when I was 15. And I would turn back.
This “turn back” that Vaka mentioned was referring to his turning away from drugs and turning to God for help. Like other deportee experiences, many of the participants’ successful reintegration stories were attributable to religious and spiritual change.

Failure to make that turnaround or to reintegrate successfully can lead to harmful situations. As Kuta shared, she knew of deportees who committed suicide because of the struggle to reintegrate. Fua expressed his thoughts on those who were not successful in making necessary changes after deportation:

There is only two ways for you: back in jail or dead. And I’ve seen people, they come and die. I knew a guy who came here. He was a prominent member in a gang. He came over here, lived the same lifestyle, still bringing the youth around, leading them astray, kind of thing and yeah, he died not long after. This is God’s land. This is the Kingdom of God. God hears things over here. And he punishes over here. You ought to take that on, that is pretty much it. Turn your life around. The only thing that is going to help you around here, it’s either that or, like I said before, two things: dead or jail. Jail over here is a piece of shit.

Yeah, that’s it.

Some deportees have gone to Tonga with the attitude that there is nothing else to live for. Ngata learned by experience that coming to Tonga gave him an opportunity to work on his vices. He also shared his experience of overcoming a drug addiction through his religious journey and his determination to become more self-reliant. Without overcoming his drug and alcohol addiction, he was not able to take care of himself. In doing so, he made a transformation that helped him with reintegration:
That it’s not the end of the world, you know what I mean? That, whatever the tendencies that you guys might, that they might fall back on, and a lot of them do, I did. As soon as I got here I was like, drinking. You know what I mean? Even though I did come straight out of lockup, I was locked up for 9 months, but before that, so a lot of the guys would come here and [drug and alcohol] dependency is what they would fall in to. And it’s what would hold us down, you know. That there is support, you know. The religion should be a support, you know. If they find those positives in, like I said, a percentage of guys come and support or no support, get lost, and they would get into dependencies, drug dependency, alcohol dependency. And then they lose their focus on trying to be self-reliant.

Ngata and Mana both shared the same feelings on developing a personal relationship with God through prayer. As Mana stated, “Just pray. Heavenly Father helps a lot.” Personal growth through religion helped both of them cope with their circumstances and endure the struggles of reintegrating as a deportee in Tonga.

For all participants, religion was a constructive, positive, and reliable institution that was there for support regardless of service attendance or spirituality levels. Issues such as substance abuse and mental health could be addressed by and through religion and spirituality, according to these Tongan deportees. Those deportees who developed an intrapersonal commitment to spiritual growth found a supportive track to reintegration. Once more, religion and Tongan daily life can be very difficult to separate.
Factors That Obstruct Reintegration Pathways

Through the analysis of the interviews, several themes emerged that were identified as hindering or thwarting the successful reintegration of Tongan deportees. As mentioned above, families were a large support unit for deportees. However, families’ lack of support was also a hindrance to the reintegration of deportees. In some instances, family support and lack of support was experienced by the same individual. For example, Mana was emotionally supported by her father, but shunned by family members in Tonga. Other deportees experienced support and lack of support from the same family member. For example, Ngata received remittances from his son, and sometime later his son stopped answering his phone. Other factors that did not assist in deportee reintegration were the unfamiliarity of the Tongan language, anga fakatonga (the Tongan way) and culture, and the stigmatization of deportees.

Lack of family support. Tonga’s central social unit is the family. However, deportees discussed that even family members were the first to be uncooperative and unaccommodating. When the deportees were separated from many family members in the U.S., they reached out to family members in Tonga in hopes of support to better reintegrate into Tongan society. Deportees also experienced unsupportive family members in the U.S. Mana received little support from family members from the U.S. for reasons that differed from those of other deportees. She mentioned her desire to see more programs to help deportees adjust to life in Tonga, as discussed later in this section.

Mana’s parents did not send her monetary support. She shared in her interview that her father was too old to be able to assist her financially. Further, apparent reasons why Mana did
not get the support she needed, both in the U.S. and in Tonga, had a lot to do with the financial stability of her parents. As she mentions below, both of her parents were U.S. citizens, while she was a green card holder, or a legal permanent resident. However, her mother’s health conditions made it very difficult for them to file for citizenship, pay for a lawyer, or send her remittances when she arrived in Tonga.

Health issues have plagued Tongans in the U.S. and consequently affected their socioeconomic status. Through dietary shifts, Tongans have faced issues such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, gout, and cancer (Thaman & Thaman, 2009). It is not surprising to hear of deportees’ parents having various health issues in the U.S. Mana’s father was also at the elderly age of 77. As evident in Mana’s experience, some families are not in the position to support their deportee family members.

Mana shares:

For me, the process, I don’t think they did it correctly, cuz my parents are both citizens. And I don’t know, it’s like how they say, “Everything was meant to be,” I guess. I shouldn’t have been deported because of how my parents are both from, they both got papers and stuff, but I was, ha koeni [what you call], I was illegal. I was legal but I guess I wasn’t, my dad didn’t really do my papers that way I could be a citizen. I was just a permanent resident. It was hard, cuz, coming from a poor house and my mom was palangi (white) and my dad was Tongan. My mom was really sick a lot. And I guess that is why we didn’t really have time back then to do my papers and stuff. Cuz my mom was in the hospital
and she had triple bypass surgery, heart problems and stuff. So, we couldn’t have afforded a lawyer to get me out of here.

Health issues have plagued Tongans in the U.S. and consequently affected their socioeconomic status. Through dietary shifts, Tongans have faced issues such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, gout, and cancer (Thaman & Thaman, 2009). It is not surprising to hear of deportees’ parents having various health issues in the U.S. Mana’s father was also at the elderly age of 77. As evident in Mana’s experience, some families are not in the position to support their deportee family members.

Other deportees had a different experience of not receiving the support they needed for reintegration. Misi shared his own experience with living with extended family and then being told he could not stay there any longer:

And they said, “You just got to go.” And I would just notice, like, little things, like my pictures would get thrown out, my clothes would come up missing, and stuff like that, but. There was, my experience it was mostly ungrateful, the people that I was around, and some of them would probably take advantage of [me], cuz my people they send money and I would freely [give], aye, I want to help out. And I knew, I had a feeling it wasn’t working, so that was, I didn’t think that people were capable of, so straightforward and they didn’t care how I thought, how I tried to help out.

He felt uncomfortable and unwelcomed by his own family. He was shocked by this, especially because when he received remittances he would use them to help his family out in
Tonga. When he noticed some of his personal belongings disappearing, he knew these were actions that matched their verbal directives to leave their home.

There were also instances where deportees made the decision not to stay with family. In Hiva’s experience, he did not want to burden his family. He chose to stay with friends he made in his short time in Tonga. When he described the period of time when he chose to stay with a group of young adult males instead of accepting support from his aunt, he used the word *fakatamaiki*. The English translation of this word is “to trouble, to annoy, to deprave” (Baker, 1897). In this context and age, the meaning has shifted over to acting boyish or puerile. This is an indication that Hiva was still not ready to make changes in his life that would help him make connections to family and lead to reintegration into the community:

I struggled, I came back here, I didn’t have a home. All my parents, everybody is there. All my aunties, I had one aunty here. I didn’t really want to put burden on her, so I just kind of came and tried to make it on my own. So kind of *fakatamaiki* at the time. It was very, very difficult for me. It was very, very difficult. See, I got lost. Because when I left [Tonga] I was young, and I came back, I didn’t really know anybody, many people had left. So I didn’t end up going back to my village, I ended staying in town, because I was *fakatamaiki*, yeah, it was kind of embarrassing.

Hiva left Tonga at a young age, and he discussed how much disconnection there was between him and the Tongan community and culture. He had one known aunt in Tonga, and he felt that staying with her would give her the burden of taking care of him, because he was not able to reintegrate quickly and find valuable employment. He also shared his embarrassment at not
being connected to family. He chose not to stay with his aunt, and decided to stay with young men he had made friends with in Nuku’alofa, the nation’s capital. Because he did not have older relatives to help his transition, the ma, or shame, fell heavily upon him and he was viewed as a wanderer or drifter who did not have an established connection to family in Tonga.

As deportees attempted to strengthen ties to family in Tonga and learn the culture, they learned of the responsibilities that came with the Tongan culture. When there is a wedding, birth, or funeral in a family or village, members of that family or village have a responsibility to help carry the load of the occasion. Funerals are an important occasion, as they are a display of love to the deceased as well as an opportunity to carry out traditional responsibilities. However, because of migration, families are split, separated, and reduced, and responsibilities are carried out by those who are able to attend. For many deportees, they carry the responsibility their parents would have carried if they were in Tonga. They may lack the cultural knowledge and the resources expected of them. Ngata shared his experience with carrying out his responsibility to a putu, or a funeral in his family. When he struggled to carry out his family obligations, he could be viewed as someone who did not understand the Tongan culture, or someone who did not respect it:

Soon the phone calls [to family in the U.S.] will not be answered. Honestly, you know what I mean? They know that “oh, man, this fool is calling again? For money?” You know what I mean? Some people don’t even understand that putus are expensive, or whatever. So they wouldn’t even pick up their phone, you know.
Support is incredibly important for deportees to reintegrate into Tongan society. When obstacles arise, especially in navigating a culture full of protocols and tapus, it is important to have as much support as possible. Mana requested, as many other deportees did, some type of support from the government or an institution outside of the family:

Get programs out here, really get them to work. If there was more jobs for them to go to work. Give us something to do, especially us that don’t have parents over here and stuff.

My dad don’t send me money like everyone else’s. Dad is 77, so ...

Hiva requested an approach from the U.S. as well as in Tonga, and believed that in collaboration it would be a stronger approach than each support working separately.

Because they [deportees] won’t tell you they need help. They won’t tell you that. But inside they’re like little babies, man. They need all the support that they can. Because, so if the, like they said, if the family back home can know how to stay supportive of them here, so that way you can connect the dots, and then the family over here as well, can work with the family back there, and you know, just kind of ... So I think they just don’t understand what the solution is for it, you know. I think they just the wrong way about it, so he’s doing okay, but, I don’t think they understand what [we’re] going through.

**Separation of family.** All participants in this study had families in the U.S., which included parents, siblings, or children. As noted in Table 1, 10 of the 12 were separated from their children by deportation. One mother was separated from four of her children. Fehi, also separated from his four children, described the struggle when he was asked about some of the difficulties he experienced when trying to adapt to life in Tonga:
Probably not having the family around. You know, that was hard. Tonga is nothing but families, the way I see it. Just being around my nephews and their own families, my brothers and them. That was one of the hardest things [besides] the wages.

When Faumalila was asked what he missed most about the U.S., he mentioned:

First of all, I think my family. I had a son in the States, I think that’s the first thing I missed, was my son. And family. Other than that it’s, everything else came last, but that’s probably what I first think of missing, because out here, like I said, didn’t know what I’m going to get.

Faumalila was deported when his son was 3 years old. Among deportees, Faumalila was a topic of discussion, because they had heard rumors of a deportee who was granted a waiver that led to the acceptance of his visa application to return to visit the U.S. Faumalila was the first known deportee to be granted a visa and return to visit his family. His relationship with his son was a motivation for him to make positive changes in his life so that he could have a chance to see his son again. When asked if deportation and separation had affected his relationship with his son, he stated:

Um, of course when I came here he was really young, eh? So it really didn’t affect that much, but as time grew, and him getting older, asking me, “Hey, when you coming back?” and stuff like that, really grew into me and really, you know, had me going “Hey, you gotta start doing something if you want to go back, you got to start doing something positive.” So, been doing that. Still good.
In dealing with the separation, several participants discussed ways they were able to maintain ties with their families in the U.S. Misi mentioned:

Well, I send pictures through Facebook, stuff like that. Visitors come down here, I send letters, I send pictures. So usually we just use like Facebook if we sending stuff like that.

They, you know, send me pictures and stuff like that of the kids. So, technology ...

Social media has been utilized as a means of connecting and maintaining familial ties. Misi was deported to Tonga in 1999, and the development of technology made it easier to communicate and stay in touch with family today, compared to the time when Misi was deported. Kuta also used Facebook to deal with being separated from her children. She stated, “But I’m always on Facebook talking to my kids, talking to my other friends.”

As most of the deportees in this study had children in the U.S., most of the discussion of family was directed toward their children and how they stayed connected with them from thousands of miles away. Deportees are not the only individuals affected by deportation. Children of deported parents also experience negative psychological outcomes caused by arrest, separation, or deportation of the parent (Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Rey, 2015).

Mohokoi, who left behind a wife and four children, discussed how he and his family dealt with the separation: “My wife tries to come back as much as she can, she even quit her career, trying to be a nurse to go work at the airlines.” Working for the airline industry, Mohokoi’s wife received flying benefits, which made it financially easier for her to travel to Tonga. On the other hand, working in the airline industry was not as well-paying as being a nurse. In the 5 years since Mohokoi was deported to Tonga, his four kids had visited once, and his wife had flown down to
Tonga to see him three times. In addition, Mohokoi’s wife and children moved in with his parents, a sign of commitment and support through strengthening the connection with Mohokoi’s family. Mohokoi had no immediate family members in Tonga at the time of his deportation. When asked about some of his worries during the deportation process he shares:

And I just thinking about my family, what’s going to happen now? Just thinking about them most of the time, just stressing about their future and everything. For me coming to Tonga wasn’t what I was worried about. It was my family that I was worried about, you know. I been here in ’84 going to school at Liahona, so I kind of felt like I knew the place, and I had family here but not close, but I had family. But I had traveled around; instead of living with my family here I went around just from people to people, and renting. I felt that was more comfortable for me, you know.

Mohokoi brought up a few key topics. First, he discussed the concern for his family when he was going through the deportation process. Secondly, he had visited Tonga only once since he and his family migrated to the U.S.; though he was confident that he was familiar enough with Tonga, it had been about 28 years since his last visit. Thirdly, the Tongan concept of *famili*, which stems from the English word of family, incorporates extended family even where connections can go back many generations. Mohokoi was not closely related to the family he was able to locate in Tonga, and felt that even with that support he was comfortable living on his own.

All 12 participating deportees discussed their separation from family members. For some deportees, all their siblings, uncles and aunts, and parents remained in the U.S. Though they were separated from family in the U.S., many were able to locate and identify family members in
Tonga, though some were very distant. Some deportees who found family decided not to stay with them. Other deportees lived with family before being kicked out of the house for various reasons. Though deportees acknowledged the desire for family support, they experienced family separation and support differently.

**Unfamiliarity with Tongan Culture**

As discussed in the literature, deportees who migrated at a younger age struggle more with reintegration upon their return to the home country. Furthermore, Tongan culture has been intact for centuries, passing on traditions, protocol, and also taboos, or *tapus*. This section discusses the cultural reintegration of deportees who had lived abroad for years.

**Speaking the language.** Many deportees expressed not knowing the language because they left Tonga at a young age, or losing the language skills because they did not practice it enough. As shown in Table 1, the average age deportees migrated to the U.S. was 4.6 years old. At this young age, they were still impressionable enough to pick up English, and in some deportee experiences, picking up English meant losing the Tongan language.

Before they came to Tonga, the language barrier had crossed the minds of several deportees. Kuta shared some of the worries she had before arriving in Tonga:

> It was more like the language barrier. Because I eat Tongan food in America, you know.

> When you have Tongan functions and stuff like that. So that was fine. But just thinking about the language, and then thinking about the riot in 2007, you know.

Kuta was not concerned with adapting to Tongan food because she grew up eating Tongan food around other Tongans and attending Tongan functions. Her worry centered on being able to
communicate with other Tongans when she arrived. She mentions the riots in 2007 in the capital city of Nuku’alofa because deportees were scapegoats and were blamed for inciting violence among young Tongans. As discussed in the literature review, Tongan officials pointed the fingers at deportees. Though she arrived years after the riot, Kuta understood the difficulties that awaited her in Tonga because of the perception that people had of deportees.

Later in her interview, she went on to elaborate on the language struggle:

And the hardest thing for me was the language. Trying to get a job. Interacting with people, because once you learn the language, then you have to differentiate if they are talking to you or at you, and if they’re, you know, they have a lot of metaphor. Like they could be talking to you in Tongan and then actually be talking about you, you know.

Idioms, expressions, and figures of speech were some of the language hurdles that deportees experienced in Tonga. Misi shared his struggle with the Tongan language:

There was a big language barrier. Before my incarceration, it was, my dad would speak it, and my whole household would speak Tongan. But I would, I would answer either in a few words in Tongan, but most of it was English. But when I go here, it was totally, the Tongan was totally different. It was too fast and I didn’t understand nothing really. It was really, and so in other words, I didn’t really understand Tongan. I thought I did, but I didn’t.

Mohokoi also learned quickly that the Tongan he spoke in the U.S. wasn’t enough or as much as he realized. He stated:

Well, you know, my parents spoke Tongan to us in the home, so I spoke Tongan. My mother was a teacher in the States, so we were ... when we spoke Tongan in the house
we have to answer in Tongan. And outside the home we spoke English, but if they talk to us in English in the home we answer in English. I was raised that way. So I spoke it, it wasn’t perfect and there were words that I didn’t know. But the language wasn’t really a barrier for me. It wasn’t something that I struggled with ... I would think the only thing that the language was the struggle was when at church. It is a different language.

In this statement he expressed an experience that he shared with many other deportees: speaking English in the home was common. With much time spent outside of the home and among many non-Tongans, English became easier to pick up and preserve. Mohokoi also shared his difficulty in understanding the Tongan spoken and used in a religious setting. Just as a different dialect is used when speaking with nobility or royalty, there is a different dialect for speaking about deity. This differs from everyday spoken Tongan, which creates hurdles for deportees in learning their culture. Vaka’s experience with the language was comparable to Mohokoi’s, as they both spoke a lot of English in the U.S.: “It was only my mother, my older brothers and sisters; everybody, we were like the first generation, so we were all speaking English. I grew up speaking English, and it just, I just lost the Tongan language and culture.”

Several were able to share the background of why their Tongan language skills were not up to par, and some shared how that affected their lives in Tonga. Like others, Misi had also assumed the Tongan he learned in the U.S. would be sufficient in Tonga:

Oh yes. That was the one of the difficulties, because like I said, in the States you talk to people, you would have the same mindset, you have something in common when you talk about something. In Tonga, what’s funny in the States is not funny here. And just
friends, finding friends, it's hard. People look down at you, they see you like you're a loser, you’re deported. They brand you, like this awful thing. And so the language, I barely spoke Tongan, you know. I spoke Tongan-English in the States. So most words were like, you know I would say, because my mom and dad spoke Tongan, so I spoke Tongan in the States, but I didn’t know that some of them were not Tongan. When I came back, then I was able to go on my mission and pronounce properly. But language is very difficult.

When Akataha was asked about his Tongan language skills, he replied, “Nah, didn’t speak good Tongan. I had a hard time. They think I was pretending. I ask them, ‘What do you mean?’ they just like, ‘Pfft, are you playing stupid or what?’” Akataha was scorned for being Tongan and not knowing the language well enough. Not understanding or speaking Tongan well marked the deportees and categorized them as different and dense.

For Ngata, the language was a struggle and continued to be a struggle even after he had been in Tonga for years:

Yes! Because I grew up in America, English was my first language. I knew how to speak Tongan, but I thought I was fluent. But when you come back to Tonga, you speak a different dialect, and the locals know that. And so, yes, they pick it up, is one. Two, they second guess and know that you’re deported. So you’re at the bottom of the totem pole anyways. Yes, it was, communication was definitely a big factor in trying to reintegrate and resettle. Very challenging. Even to this day, I mean, I been here 7 years and I’m fluent Tongan, but when I speak Tongan, people can always say or know that I am not local, I have a different dialect or something. You know what I mean, they always ask, “Na’a ke
“nofo muli koe?” [Did you live overseas?] Yes, I have, you know. And in my mind, good and bad, the first thing I’m thinking is, are they gonna size me up? Are they thinking I’m deported?

Because he did not speak like native Tongans, Ngata was easily recognized as someone from overseas. As he declares, this was a setback for deportation reintegration as he strove to fit in and be accepted as Tongan. Deportees often lean on their family and friends to help them learn the language. In Fua’s experience, he learned that experience would be the best teacher:

I mean, I didn’t want to speak English to everybody else here, I mean, speak Tongan to everybody here, cuz, you know? I mean, my Tongan was broken compared to the Tongans here. I backed off, but I’m a fast learner, you know, so I spoke to girls, mainly just girls, because yeah, I have my first cousin here, my mom’s nephew, my mom’s brother’s son, you know? So he took me around, he said, “First thing we’re going to do, this is how you’re going to learn to speak Tongan. Hang out with girls, you know, learn how to speak it, you know? You got to learn how to speak to a girl in Tongan and know the kind of personalities of the girls in Tonga. You’re going to learn how to speak Tongan properly, I mean, you go and hang out with guys, you’re not going to learn much from them, they aren’t going to teach you things. They don’t even speak Tongan properly, you know?” I mean, pretty much, yeah, learning how to speak Tongan, proper Tongan.

Mana learned the Tongan language through tough patience and love. When asked how she picked up the language, she replied:
Just taking it day by day. Slowly listening to what they’re saying. And a lot of yelling at me to understand too ... I didn’t know how to speak no Tongan. No Tongan at all. I mean, lucky thing for my aunt, she does sign language, so I could understand what was going on.

When Kuta was asked the same question, she said, “Watch TV. Talk with the kids. Play with the kids. Babysit.”

Though many learned through family and friends how to speak Tongan, there were some who did not struggle like the others. Tapu’s parents put great effort into speaking Tongan to their children in the U.S.:

Well, you know, my parents spoke Tongan to us in the home, so I spoke Tongan. My mother was a teacher in the States, so we were, when we spoke Tongan in the house we have to answer in Tongan. And outside the home we spoke English, but if they talk to us in English in the home we answer in English. I was raised that way. So I spoke it, it wasn’t perfect and there were words that I didn’t know. But the language wasn’t really a barrier for me. It wasn’t something that I struggled with.

Fehi had no problem with the language, and he attributed that to immigrating to the U.S. at 9 years old when he had a great grip on the language. He also mentioned spending a year as a teenager in Tonga. When asked about language barriers, he said, “Not really. I think because when I left here I was about 9 years old. So I pretty much kind of remember things. So when I came back, it didn’t take that long to pick it back up.”

As shared by the deportees, each of them had unique experiences of reintegration. Besides being a means of communication, language carries much of the Tongan values,
traditions, and heritage. A majority of participants—10 deportees—reported having some difficulty in learning the language. The next section examines deportees’ experiences of navigating through the culture, and for some of them, it was navigating without the expected language skills.

**Navigating through culture.** In their reintegration to Tonga, some of the deportees shared how “lost” they were because they did not know how to navigate through the Tongan culture, traditions, and protocols. The disconnection of Tongan Americans raised in the U.S. from the Tongan culture has been documented (Hansen, 2004). As mentioned above, with many of the deportees not knowing the Tongan language, many traditions that are usually passed through the language were also lost. This section examines how the familiarity or unfamiliarity of Tongan culture affected the reintegration of deportees.

One of the foremost aspects of Tongan life that deportees discussed adapting to was the Tongan diet. Several of them shared their struggles with getting used to Tongan food. Akataha shared his difficulties with food: “I wasn’t used to the food. I just eat bread and they always complaining. Just have to adapt to being here, eh ... When I first came here, no fast food restaurant, nothing. I was like?” The “complaining” that Akataha referred to was from family and friends who criticized him for not adapting well to Tongan food. Misi shared similar struggles with food in Tonga:

- Something else I struggled with was food. Food. Oh my gosh! I remember food was, I struggled with food. I knew the money that I was receiving was, it was wasted on just bread and canned food. And I couldn’t adjust. Actually I got sent to the hospital, I was
trying to adjust to Tongan food and I got sick. And I was sent to the hospital. And I actually starved. I was actually starving cuz I couldn’t eat it.

It took some time for Misi to adjust to the Tongan food; he was hospitalized and dealt with some adversity. Tongans in America have some access to Tongan foods such as yams, sweet potato, or taro, which are shipped to the continental U.S. However, not all Tongan Americans who have access to this food eat it, or even like it. Mana, discussing some of the difficulties in adapting to life in Tonga, said, “The food. Cuz mind you, back home we don’t eat Tonga food. My dad really ate by himself. We never ate it cuz we had palangi [American] food.”

When Fua was asked about things he missed overseas, he stated:

Food. Yeah, fast food places, I mean, we have good food in Tonga, I mean, mind you, we have good food in Tonga, but, of course, you know, you miss the McDs, you miss Burger King, Wendy’s, I mean that’s pretty much it.

Fast food restaurants were heavily missed by some of the deportees. Tonga has no fast food chain restaurants in the country, but there are several establishments that do sell foods such as burgers and fries. As evident in some of the responses, these establishments are not like fast food restaurants in the U.S.

Not everyone experienced difficulty with adapting to foods available in Tonga. In this exchange with Faumalila, he described food as an easy part of the Tongan life to adjust to compared to missing his family:
Researcher: So what were some of the things that were easy to adapt to, when you first came?

Faumalila: Food. (laugh)

Researcher: Food was easy, huh? Faumalila: Food was, I guess the thing I was, just being tau’ataina [unrestricted, free], you know what I mean? Because coming out of the pen[itentiary], being there for so long, and coming out here, that’s what really got my mind off the tension of being here, was being free. You know, and then late at night, when you laying down and thinking of your family, as soon as their names come up, you’re like, “Aww man, what’s going?”

Faumalila found comfort in Tongan food, and it helped him to cope with missing family back in the U.S. He started to tear up discussing his family back home. Through this hardship and because of spending time incarcerated in the U.S. before deportation, Tongan food became a reminder to him that he was not locked up, but free.

In Kuta’s interview, she also shared how food was not a barrier or a difficulty. She was accustomed to eating Tongan food in the U.S. at Tongan functions such as birthdays, weddings, and funerals, which always involved Tongan food: “It was more like the language barrier. Because I eat Tongan food in America, you know. When you have Tongan functions and stuff like that. So that was fine.”

For many deportees, Tonga was a distant memory or a faded memory. For some, Tonga only existed in their imagination, based on stories shared by older Tongans or those who had gone to visit. An exchange with Kuta was an example of how it had been since being in Tonga:
Researcher: When you left in ’75, were there any visits to come back to Tonga?

Kuta: No, no.

Researcher: The first time was 2010?

Kuta: Yeah.

After she had been away for about 35 years, there were several things that surprised Kuta:

All the animals just run wild, and how they, the bells, the church bells. I really noticed that one. And the chickens early in the morning, and them talking about how fun it is to eat dogs, and stuff like that.

In Tonga, there are no laws that require pet owners to place animals on a leash or in an enclosed area. Animals mostly run free in Tonga, yet all villagers know to whom they belong. Chickens also run wildly and roosters crow in the early morning hours, which could be a rude awakening for many visitors. Kuta was surprised by the church bells that rang loudly on Sunday mornings to alert the church members of a service. Sometimes a loud lali, or drum, is used instead of a bell. This alarm that rings sometimes as early as 5:00 a.m. may surprise and even bother those who are not accustomed to being awakened by loud sounds in the early morning. One food item that Kuta was not accustomed to eating was dog meat. As she stated, she did not find it amusing as the local Tongans.

Besides food, deportees had to adjust to other aspects of life for Tongans. Akataha shared how he thought Tonga would be as developed as Hawai’I, since both were islands. The mall in the U.S. was a social space for shopping and hanging out. In Tonga, there are no malls, so deportees look for different social spaces to mingle and meet other people. Akataha shared:
Just being in a, it’s just different, yeah? In the fast lane, eh, being in America. Here, everything is slow... really behind (laugh). I thought it was [going to be] like Hawai’i. I was like? No theatre, no mall, man!

Hiva discussed his struggle with things like running water and hot water. For many homes in Tonga, there is no hot water, so showers are usually cold. Running water is also an issue, as there are many households that fetch water from a water tank near the home.

Oh, it was harsh and culture shock. It was like, I didn’t know what to expect, you know, when I came here. When I was in the States, when they transferred me, you know, even simple things, running water, hot water, and just being able to connect to people, talking to people, understanding the mindset, huh, it was hard. It was really, really hard for me. I struggled, I came back here, I didn’t have a home. All my parents, everybody is there.

When he shared his struggles adapting to a developing country, he mentioned his family members in the U.S. Without having close family like his parents there in Tonga, it was difficult for him to navigate even through daily life.

Ngata stated:

I don’t know. Like I said, everything was like a surprise coming to Tonga, I mean I knew, I had ideas, you know, about the putus [funerals], about eating a lot of fish because we’re surrounded by ocean. Other than that, the other cultural stuff, was all a big shock to me, you know. Whether I wasn’t willing to accept my new environment, my new area that I will be living in, it took a while, it still takes a while and I’m still not used to all of the cultural stuff. But it’s, as far as our Tongan traditions and stuff like that, still trying to get
used to the *putus* and how expensive they are, and stuff like that, you know. I still don’t understand how, cuz education here is the key to things, but sometimes *putus* are ... investing so much money into *putus*, you know, and puts people behind and their kids can’t even get educated. So, still getting used to the cultural stuff.

Understanding the cultural expectations and duties took time, as experienced by Ngata. As goods became more expensive over time, Ngata and other deportees had to carry the expensive burdens while learning the cultural responsibilities. Ngata realized that cultural responsibility sometimes superseded education and other priorities. This experience taught Ngata how important it is to understand the culture. Just as Hiva stated above, it could be more difficult without having parents there to pass down cultural knowledge.

Misi shared his thoughts on the expectations he had of Tonga:

When I knew, I knew I was coming back to the country, actually, I thought it was a dumb idea, but when I got here, my expectations was like, wow, I didn’t know it was this good. I thought it was still going to be wagons and dirt roads and stuff. But, the expectations that I see and noticed was, was the people. As I grew up I thought the Tongans were friendly, stuff like that. They was a whole different. It was backwards. It was like the real world.

The expectations that Misi had about the people accepting him were challenged when he arrived as a deportee. He anticipated a warmer welcome because of the nickname Captain Cook gave the islands, “The Friendly Islands.” Misi experienced a totally different welcome from the native
Tongans. As he later shared, the stigma of being a deportee negatively affected his welcome in Tonga.

Part of the shock that Tapu experienced when he landed in Tonga was how dark it was on the island. As a developing nation, in the late 1990s when Tapu arrived, Tonga was not as well-lit as the U.S. cities where Tongan deportees lived. As all deportees came from large metro cities in the U.S. with well-lit communities, transitioning to Tonga where some homes did not have electricity at all could be a shock. The harsh realities of the Tongan lifestyle could make it difficult for deportees to reintegrate. Tapu shared his experience when he first arrived in Tonga:

It was a shock, you know, like, growing up in the States and then coming here, you know. Seeing the little lights. I got here at night, so I see a little bit of lights and thought, man. But, when I got off the plane, no one knew I was coming. So I just got my bags, found the cab, and I just took a taxi to where my dad and them are from. Where his house, his property is, and lived on over where my cousins were living.

Coupled with some of the cultural differences, in his first minutes upon arrival, Tapu started having to make challenging decisions. Arriving in the late evening, he decided to head over to his father’s village, as he believed that was his best chance to find a place to sleep for the night.

Vaka discussed employment in Tonga in great depth. He worked in the U.S. for several decades and at one point, “was making over a $100,000 a year.” His long experience as a longshoreman and a teamster helped him provide well for his family. Being deported to Tonga and not having opportunities to work in these jobs was a setback for Vaka. In one part of the conversation, he argued that wages should be higher:
The wages, and, yeah, the wages. The wages and the working conditions that these people around here are receiving, you know. I feel like these wages need to come up severely, you know. Three dollars, pa’anga [Tongan currency] for these security guards. That’s, you know, that’s not enough. I mean three dollars pa’anga is almost the minimum and top wages out here is, well, three dollars pa’anga an hour. So that’s like three times eight ... 24 a day. So that’s, times seven, that’s, times seven is ... 168. And the top, they already have it all paced out. The top is 300 [$133 USD] pa’anga a week. So, that’s the going rate.

Faumalilila believed that skills such as farming were important for Tongans because they gave them something to pass the time, as well as provide money and food for the family. When asked if deportees should pick up farming, he said:

Yeah. I’m just saying this because, I have a little brother, na’e fakafoki mai mo ia [he was deported as well], and toki ha’u foki ia [when he came he was] doing the same things he was doing in the States and get sent to Tolitoli [Tongan prison]. They went in there, and they start doing the, alu koia ki uta [work on the plantations]. See now that he’s released, he’s knowing that, that’s what he’s doing now. Even though we don’t have a piece of land out here, ka oku ma’u kii konga liisi, a ia koe toe [he has leased a parcel of land, which has remaining] it’s like a fast one for five years. So, he’s leasing and has been out for over two years now, but I mean, I see oku ‘aonga [it is worthwhile]. It occupies your time, at the same time it puts money in your pocket, puts food on your table, you know. So you don’t have to think about doing the stupid stuff.
Because all the participants came from metro cities in the U.S., they had little to no experience in farming, not to mention farming plants such as taro, yams, and tapioca. While several deportees discussed difficulty eating these plants and other Tongan foods, more struggled with jobs and planting the foods. Turning to farming can be problematic because land is passed down from father to oldest son. If their fathers do not have land, they must lease land to start farming, which costs money that deportees do not have.

Kuta also experienced difficulty in landing a job. Although she felt she had credentials and the experience for certain jobs in Tonga, she was not hired because she did not have the social connections in Tonga:

Here in Tonga it’s not what you know, but who you know. I been working since 1983, you know. For the YEP in the [United] States, for youth employment. So I worked as, like, I’ll just tell you all the little jobs, different jobs I had. So you can just imagine what I could’ve found here, you know. And I went everywhere. So I been, I was a librarian, meaning stocking, you know stuff like that. And then I went and I was waitressing. And then after that I worked as a receptionist. And then after that I worked at the post office. And then after that I worked at the WIC department, and then I worked as a billing clerk at the health clinic. So I would have like all these jobs, all the way up to where I got arrested. And then I came and I made my resume, and I went to all these different places, I went to the pool, I went everywhere that were hiring. They would not hire me. And when I was in prison [in the U.S.] I got my welding certificate. They needed a welder, I went over there and they’re like, “mai a Kuta” [bring Kuta in] and I said, “I’m right here,” and they go, “ika’i
“mai koe a Kuta” [No, you bring Kuta] and I said, “ikai ko au eni” [No, that’s me], and they go, they brought my resume to me, and I go, “oh alu mai tamasi’i koe” [Oh, go and bring this boy], and I said, “Ko au eni ko hokinga ena, ko au eni, ko au Kuta” [That is me, that’s my name. That’s me, I am Kuta], and they said, “oleva ange” [Wait a minute!] and they went to the back, and then like five minutes later, all the guys was looking this way, all the women was looking that way, I never got the job. In Tonga it’s who you know, it’s not what you know.

Besides not having the social connections, Kuta also experienced the double hurdles of being female and a deportee. Tongans have gendered expectations of behavior that does not include women performing labor such as welding. Kuta’s story of being rejected with the job experience required for the position is an example of the challenges deportees face in Tonga.

Further, deportees discussed complications in reintegration because of the differences in attitude and mentality of native Tongans. Kuta explained that it could sometimes be harder for men to re integrate because of the expectation to fight others. Female deportees did not necessarily have to fight to feel accepted, as fighting was viewed as shameful for women, but acceptable for men. She shared why it was tougher:

It’s easier for me to cope than for them to cope ... I don’t have to fight nobody. They are very territorial here in Tonga. Like, if you weren’t raised in Fasi, don’t let me catch you walking around Fasi. And don’t, you know if you’re walking in Fasi, don’t be speaking English or whatever, you know. They want you to walk quiet and with your head down, don’t say anything.
Vaka believed that it was taught at a young age that fighting or striking someone was an accepted problem-solving strategy:

Should have some programs, some behavioral programs like anger management programs, because most of the kids that are here, like I said, has already been affected by anger through our heritage. You know, fortunately, a few of our families will grow up in nice little family, you know. Without these. But, it’s the normal, they call it the norm, and it’s not the norm, you know. It’s not the norm, I’ll tell you right now. They talk it, like every word out there is “ta’i, ta’i, ta’i” [hit, hit, hit]. It’s like, the war has been over for thousands of years right now, and they still have that war mentality. You know what I mean?

Vaka was the victim of several physical assaults by young Tongan men. Several weeks before the interview, Vaka’s leg was in a cast and his arm was in a sling. He experienced a broken leg and a torn rotator cuff when a group of young men jumped him for the money he made while driving a tuktuk (auto rickshaw). It was obvious why Vaka wanted to see programs that addressed the attitudes of violence in Tongan society. The biggest hurdle for Vaka was finding employment. However, after finding employment as a tuktuk driver, his main concern became his safety.

**Stigma, Stereotypes, and Shame**

Participants claimed they were easily identified as deportees because of their dress, speech, or behavior, and that stigmatization was frequent and penetrating. Many of the difficulties of reintegration discussed by participants were related to the stereotypes and shame of being a deportee. This section will concentrate on deportee experiences of carrying the mark of deportation, and the *ma* or shame that accompanied the stigma.
Some of the basic stereotypes mentioned by deportees included being a drug dealer, thief, or violent gang member. Here are Misi’s thoughts on stereotypes:

I mean, they think we are all drug dealers; we’re all, have something to do with the underworld [illicit drug trade], you know. Because some of them do, but because we know each other and hang around each other, they think that we all on the same page, you know. But we just hang around each other because that’s all we have, you know. And then, at the same time, we beginning to know more people and with church people, we hanging around church people at the same time. But first all we had was each other, you know.

Misi pointed out a major difficulty in reintegration. As he experienced, Misi gravitated to people who were like him, which usually meant other Tongans from the U.S. who could speak English. This sometimes meant connecting with other deportees. Though he stayed out of trouble, his association with other deportees and the deportee tag gave Tongans the idea that he was a drug dealer. He also shared his efforts to spend time with “church people,” revealing his understanding of Tongans’ views on associating with religious people.

Hiva shared the same thoughts on stereotypes:

Criminal. Drugs. Drug addicts. Loser. They, and when they say deportee, they just automatically thinking you’re dealing drugs or you’re going to steal their car, or (laughing) just thinking about a gang member in the States, you’re Crip or you’re Blood.
Kuta, too, discussed the stereotypes of being a deportee, which also included being a thief, drug abuser, and violent. She also mentioned being teased, which was experienced and reported by many deportees. She shared:

They think you’re a bad person. They think you steal. They think that you do drugs. They think you might hurt them in their sleep. They don’t trust you at all. And they make fun of deportees, like, all the time. Some even make fun of them to me, and I’m looking at them and I go, “I am a deportee,” you know?

Akataha also experienced the teasing. He stated:

Most of that was that the way people act and how you talk to them. And for me it was hard. Over here they make jokes, yeah, over here. I wasn’t used to it. I took everything serious. I got into a lot of fights over here. I win some but I lose some.

The teasing led to Akataha getting into many fights because he internalized the teasing. Deportees who tried to mingle with villagers, or people outside of their families, found the teasing to be frequent; thus the numerous fights Akataha was involved in.

Mana’s experience was similar:

I finally realize that they been talking about me like the whole time. And here I am responding, and then I call them out on it. I say, “Wait a minute, hold on. *Talu e tau nofo heni oku ke hanga o lau’i au?* [Since we been here you been talking about me?] Like that” and they go “*si’i koe soki*” [It’s just a joke] and I say, “No, no. *Oua teke soki koe. Kou uhinga atu au ia*” [No, don’t you joke around with me, that’s what I mean], “I mean, what the
hell,” you know? So, I’ve stopped talking to a lot of people because as soon as I find that out, you know what I mean, they say hi, don’t talk to me, you know.

In Mana’s experience, she sometimes avoided meeting people in public because of the fear of being tormented by other Tongans. By withdrawing herself from society, she also missed the few opportunities that would support her reintegration.

Fehi found a way to deal with the teasing: “Yeah, you can hear them talking, you know, teasing you and stuff like that, but ... you know, you just have to prove them wrong by working hard and earn something. That pretty much just shuts them up.” The ability to provide for his family and to hold a steady job assisted Fehi in dealing and shutting down the teasers. This did not work for everyone, but those who found steady employment saw the teasing come to an end.

Deportees are “othered” and are categorized as different. Although they may share the same physical features like skin color, they are culturally distanced, and native Tongans pounce on opportunities to expose this distance. Faumalila shared an experience of being labeled as different:

As soon as they say “deportees,” they think that we’re another nationality or something bad. We’re still Tongan. Because out here, koe hoko atu pe ha kii [when there is any type of] crime anywhere, hae fale [burglary] or anything out here, it’s always, “oh koe kau tipota ena oku nau” [Oh, those deportees are], you know?

They not only face being “othered” by Tongans, but they are the scapegoats for anything negative in the community. Faumalila continued:
They’re like thinking of you as another culture, another culture or matakali kehe kita ia he taimi koia [a different race at that time]. Plus the language was kind of hard, trying to get back at it. Um, that’s about it, everything else was cool, it’s just trying to get used to associating with people, you know. Especially the language, kovi e lea, toe [speaking was terrible, and then] appearance. I guess they look at you, you got tattoos and stuff like that, you already branded as a criminal, I guess.

Faumalila was determined to step out of his comfort zone to associate with people outside of his family circle. Being labeled as someone different made it difficult for Faumalila to make connections in the community.

The deportee label reinforces the tag of the “suitable enemy,” as discussed by Wacquant (1999). Deportees are not only blamed for social ills, but thought to be second-class, inferior people. Ngata stated:

- The deportee tag was a negative tag. You’re less than the worst person in the world.
- You’re probably less than the people who committed crimes here, because you’re deported. You know what I mean? Even to this day. But again, it’s a tag that will always be there, because we can’t change society.

Tapu also felt berated by Tongans, but took advice from his family on overcoming the prejudice:

- That’s a funny thing, I always thought, because I was a deportee I was always going to be looked at like a second rate because I’m a deportee, but my parents, they were just here, my dad’s there, the third youngest out of twelve kids, and you know. And in Tonga the oldest like myself, I’m the oldest child, I get acknowledgement and everything and the
people I know. They know and they look at me and they treat me well, because I’m the oldest, you know. But then when I came to Tonga, I thought I was second rate because I was a deportee, my parents told me something that I already knew but I just needed somebody to kind of remind me, kind of a thing. They told me, “You know you got to prove yourself. Give them something to appreciate. Do something, you know, get a job, work, save your money, make money.” Cuz I mean, pretty much, things come back to money.

Tapu described the success he was able to find in reintegration. His job success allowed him to navigate different circles in the community, in church, and among deportees because he understood that gaining money could earn him enough respect to overlook the deportee tag. Tapu was also aware of the cultural social standings and his rank in his family. However, even with a higher rank, Tapu still dealt with the stigma of being a deportee.

As supported by the literature, even Tongan officials have blamed deportees for social ills in Tonga. Deportees are well aware of the weight that comes with the deportee stigma. Tapu stated, “I think the basic stereotypes is, every time they hear crime, they blame it on the deportee. That’s the basic stereotype. Is like because he got deported. ‘Aw, you did something bad,’ that word just carries something.”

Faumalila added:

That’s the kind of brand, I guess, they [place] on us out here. Really, people needs to, you know. Plus some of them come out here, does some other things. And even though they, sio ki he [look at that], like Tolitoli (Tongan prison), you know. It’s all the local kids, but
they said, “Oh ikai koe kau tipota koe na’e ha’u faka’aonga’i kauleka koe ke nau alu …”

[Oh no, it’s the deportees who took the kids and they went and ... committed crimes].

Everything is tuku pe ki he kau tipota [blamed on the deportees].

The road to reintegration of deportees in Tonga is made harder to navigate by the bumps discussed in this section. Bumps such as the stigma lead to distrust and further suspicion of deportees. Akataha stated:

Yeah, some people do, like, they won’t accept us to come around their houses. They think we still criminals, like some deportees still doing the same thing they was doing in America. I have to earn their trust. Some people, some people [don’t] they trust me. I don’t blame them, eh.

The reintegration process is distinct from the personal changes made by deportees. As Akataha pointed out, there is a belief that deportees continue to commit crime. Even after years of turning from crime, reintegration is still difficult because of the social factors. Hiva was familiar with the situation:

Well, I didn’t mind it [stereotypes]. Like when I was living with my friend, the second house that I moved to, they had girls. They had girls there. They had young girls that were still at Liahona High School, and they always thought I was going to do something to them. They always think, “Oh, he’s a deportee. We better be careful.” And one thing, the mother, she said to me, they brought me upstairs and they said, “I think you better, we think that something might happen between you and our children.” Man, I said, “These
kids are like my sisters. You know, you guys love me, you guys took me in. So I’m not, yeah I made a mistake [in the U.S.]. But, that’s not me, you know. That’s not me!”

Hiva was kicked out of the house he was living in because the family did not trust him around their daughters. Even though he had changed his life and lived crime free for some time, the stigma attached to Hiva was enough for the family to ask him to leave. Hiva also pointed out that the family he was living with was not family, but after he spent time with them, they became family, or kainga. However, even after a deportee is adopted into a family, they can still be distrusted. This is due to the stigma that is attached specifically with Hiva and the crime he committed in the U.S. For many others, the stigma experienced was attached to them as a deportee and not necessarily to their actions in the U.S.

Fua shared similar feelings of stigma, though they were related to physical appearance:

So if you dress like a deportee, baggy clothes and everything, they tend to shut you out to turn you away. You got baggy pants, “That guy’s a deportee, don’t bring him along.” They accept your dress just to a certain point. For example, they would invite you to their house, but you can’t be left alone because you’re dressed like that. I don’t mind it, I mean, you’re allowed to meet their sister, but you can’t be left alone because you might do some cunning acts.

Deportees endure the stigma and discrimination without interventions to help them deal with the shame. The embarrassment discussed above is a reaction to the shame they experience. Akataha explained, “I was shame, man. I didn’t know what to do. If my family will accept me? All
my brothers and sisters are here, and I was never raised with them. I was adopted, so I don’t even know them.”

Akataha experienced shame throughout his time in Tonga, but his deportation procedure began with feeling ashamed. He shared that on his flight from the U.S. to Tonga, the bodies of two Tongan royal family members were on the same plane. The two royal family members were visiting California when they were killed in a car accident. Thousands of Tongans gathered at Fua’amotu International Airport to await the bodies and pay respect to the royal family. Akataha and another deportee was forced to exit the arrival area after passing through Customs and Immigration Control. Fua’amotu International Airport has only one exit, and all eyes awaiting the arrival of the royal family members were focused on the exit. Akataha asked to exit after everyone had cleared the area to avoid being the center of attention, but was forced out by Customs and Immigration officers while the large crowd waited outside of the only exit for arrivals. He shared with me the shame he felt walking out in shackles with thousands of Tongans watching him and branding him before he had a chance to prove himself. This personal story was revealed before he felt comfortable being audio recorded.

This story was corroborated when my cousin warned me that Akataha was a “bad guy,” as shared in the introduction. She recognized him, just like many other Tongans have, as the man who was deported on the same flight as the royal family members. Many other deportees are recognized as deportees by their dress, or by word of mouth. In Akataha’s experience, the whole of Tonga saw him in shackles and watched the officers remove the shackles from his hands. It is fathomable to see why Akataha “took everything serious” and “got into a lot of fights over here.”
The shame, stigma, and lack of reintegrative programs in the country hinder the progress of deportees.

The lack of support and tolerance for deportees is widespread in Tonga. Mana said:

No matter what, being deported, you ain’t going to get no kind of remorse from anyone. Not when they’re like, “Oh, she’s deported” ... I was so lonely, especially when my dad’s family looked down on me because I was being deported. Being deported is a big thing, everybody looked down on you. You don’t get no kind of mercy from anyone until they really get to know you, and then they, like, forget how you got here and why you came.

Mana echoed the feelings of many of the deportees. However, she did include an “until,” which became the exception to being ostracized. She indicated that deportees were detested until people got to know them on a personal level. The difficulties, however, lay in breaking the barriers of the stigma and shame. Kuta gave an example: “Just the look of, no one wants to know who you are. That was one of the most unpleasant. You don’t get no, you get that feeling when you know everyone is like, eww. You’re a criminal!”

**Deportee Needs**

The needs of released offenders in the U.S. have been well documented. However, very little has been published on the needs of offenders who are released, or deported, to another country. This portion of the findings explores the perceptions of deportees on the needs and interventions that are expected for a successful reintegration. A majority of participants mentioned support at the government or community level as something that was lacking, but necessary for future deportees.
Fehi shared his thoughts on deportee needs:

Most deportees have been in the States since they were like, 5 years old. So coming back to Tonga is a big change. It’s just like you were born in the States. So I think a program, I don’t think they have a program, it’s trying to teach them how to survive, how to live off on your own coming back. Or at least have some kind of facilities where they can, cuz some of them, they have to come squeeze in with a family. Need a facility where they can come, like a halfway house in the States, then you teach them all that stuff. Cuz some of them will do well, they have families that they can just come and fit in with them, but most of them don’t. Most of them will take about 3-4 years before they start fitting in somewhere, or find a place to live to survive. We’re just forcing them, or just lucky that we had siblings out here, you know, they helped us to move on.

Fehi pointed out a need for several things, including a reintegration program to help deportees adapt to the Tongan culture and way of life. As Fehi mentioned, deportees have been in the U.S. for many years, with many deportees feeling more American than Tongan. A “halfway house,” as Fehi recommended, could aid deportees in “learning all that stuff.” Vaka supported that idea: “Yeah, a halfway house, that’s where they need to go transition.”

Kuta also backed the idea of a halfway house:

I think they should have, like, some kind of a halfway house here in Tonga. Because there is nothing for deportees, you know what I mean? And, just judging from the way I was brought here, I didn’t even know who was going to pick me up, you know. I was surprised my brother was looking for me that day that he was on his way to the airport. There
should be like a halfway house. If you’re going to send me to another country, you know, then give me a choice, I want to go to a halfway house. It’s not mandatory, but give them the chance, an option, if you want to go to a halfway house to where they reintroduce the language, the customs, things to do, things not to do, things to avoid, you know. Have some kind of a training, to where you can get reintroduced into society, as far as getting your job. Because most people that has been deported has more skills than the people here in Tonga, but they don’t have a chance, because everybody can tell that they are not from here.

The transition for deportees should start from the day deportees arrive at the airport. In Kuta’s experience, the fear of being deported and not knowing if there would be any support was worrisome for her. Luckily, she was picked up by a brother. This type of support helps deportees deal with the unknown. Kuta continued to discuss the importance of learning the language and the customs in Tonga. The anga fakatonga, or Tongan way, is vital in navigating the Tongan community. Without understanding anga fakatonga, deportees are easily identifiable and labeled, further complicating the reintegration process.

Hiva added to the discussion on the importance of interventions, particularly a halfway house:

What I’m saying is that I think that, man, to make some kind of halfway home for them or halfway house or something, just to avoid all the issues that I went through, the struggles that I went through. Because, like I said, when they touch down, some people are lucky, they touch down and they have support of aunties. Even then, after a while, then because
of the difference in culture, it’s different. So I think maybe a guideline saying, this is what you can do, you know, to find a job. Or find a residence or a place to stay, on his own. Until he makes it, but I would like to see that, because that would really help them out.

Housing and employment are two significant obstacles to prisoner reintegration. Hiva mentioned that being unfamiliar with the culture could be difficult because of how different it was from American culture. Also important to Hiva was having someone at the airport to greet deportees. Not every deportee has family support, so having any type of support outside of the family would be beneficial.

Several deportees in this study also attempted to meet and form a support group with other deportees. Deportees do not have a master list, but hear by word of mouth about deportees arriving in Tonga. Ngata and other deportees formed a deportee support group in Tonga:

I am part of a group, I am actually president of a group called “DPRT,” DPRT, and if you put the vowels in it, stands for deport. But it stands for Determined People Return to Tonga. And I started it out as a support group for all the guys that’s coming in, you know.

Mohokoi agreed with the importance of having a support group with other deportees:

Oh, to me I wish there was a program where we, ourselves, can get together and just use the knowledge we have to help each other. And to be there for each other on helping [each] other jobwise. Some of them that are here … just can’t adapt. For one reason or another their situations are, we’re not all, we don’t all have the same backings, you know,
support system ... and help them uh, get into society better. It’s really, there’s time, some of them, some deportees just can’t figure it out. With a little run support system, they can be able to adapt and just make their time worthwhile while they are here.

Vaka’s perspective on helping other deportees was comparable:

I was trying to get a meeting, a gathering of the deportees so we have some kind of money to have a, to a place where they come off. They come from wherever, and they can go right into it. And they can start their transition and they could, you know, from there. I think that would be very helpful for the deportees, because if they’re just going to come out of jail, whatever crime they did, and they let them out here in this third world country? You know, it’s not going to look good for the people they running it, you know. Because that’s all they know. They be robbing, strong arming, that’s what they are going to do here. That’s all they know.

The interventions in Tonga should be focused not only on adapting to the culture, but also on helping deportees overcome some of the challenges that put them in trouble in the first place. Without the support they need, they will easily fall back to what they know.

Ngata shared his feelings on the importance of support: “Cuz like they, some guys come and they have nothing. They’re put here, and man, I know some of these guys, and these guys are back on alcoholic dependency because of the situation. You know, there’s no support groups.” The issues that deportees faced in the U.S. do not disappear once they are deported. They still face those problems, without the normal support they would have received in the U.S. Akataha felt the same way: “They should just accept them [deportees] because they’re all
Tongans. They just make fun of them and stuff like that. They just start going back to what they used to do in America,” he said, referring to the things they did that got them deported to Tonga.

Fua gave more insight:

But then you still got the people who still love the fast lane. Everybody still wanted to get back on the same high they were on overseas. Man, it ain’t gonna work, you know. I mean, the drugs is the same.

Again, the issues that existed in the U.S. for deportees do not dissolve once they arrive in Tonga.

Those problems persist, and are being addressed concurrently with reintegration issues.

Ngata’s perspective on helping deportees did not start in Tonga, but in the U.S. He said:

Sooner you get your citizenship, the sooner you get locked in, and with the Trump situation, it might be the sooner you’re out [deported], you know what I mean? But it’s an education. That’s one education on that part of it, to let them know that you’re on thin ice out here, act right or you’re gonna be out. You know what I mean. We are the examples of being out, you know what I mean? That’s part of the education. Some of it here.

Several deportees mentioned experiences with immigration lawyers in the U.S. Ngata supported the education of Tongans on the meaning of citizenship and Lawful Permanent Residents. He pushed for education among Tongan youth in the U.S. as a preventive measure and an investment in the future of young Tongans.

Mental health issues among deportees was scarcely mentioned in the interviews. Literature finds that those who experience mental illness may not seek counseling or services
due to the stigma (Allen, Kim, Smith, and Hafoka, 2016). Following the literature, deportees are more willing to discuss the mental health issues of others. Kuta states:

But I can see from what I went through, I can see why a lot of people have committed suicide, you know. There’s a lot of deportee that has committed suicide in Tonga. And I know that they are mostly men, because they can’t cope.

Kuta goes on to express her feelings about the only certified psychiatrist in the country:

And when they send you to Matamoho, trust me when you come back, you’re gone! So here in Tongan you have to be careful that they don’t send you to Matamoho. They send anybody that they can’t control, to Matamoho. And it’s really scary because there’s no checks and balances for his work, you know what I mean? Whatever he says or do, that’s it. Because it’s only him you know.

Ngata adds:

It’s time to buckle down, time to make changes. Because if you don’t, your wheels are gonna spin for the rest of your time out here in Tonga and you might need, you might need mental health [counseling]. Once you get into that mental health cycle you’re done man.

Deportees understand that the available mental health services are not adequate to deal with their issues. Although deportees did not self-report mental health issues, it is evident in their responses the need for certified and informed mental health professionals to address the personal matters of deportees.
Conclusion

Within this chapter, the themes found in the interviews of deportees were discussed and presented. Global themes such as religion, family, shame and acculturation are discussed as factors leading towards or away from reintegration. A particular focus was placed on the experiences of the deportees as well as their words and how they made sense of their lived experiences. The focus in this section was based on IPA methodology and gaining access to the first person view of deportation experiences in Tonga. In the next chapter I focus on the interpretations of these findings.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined the experiences of Tongans who were deported from the U.S. back to Tonga after criminal convictions. The last chapter focused on their individual perspectives of their reintegration as deportees. As discussed in that chapter, these perspectives are important in learning about their successes, their hurdles, and how these hurdles can be addressed. Being able to use deportees’ experiences and own words added a facet to this study that is lacking in the field of reintegration of deportees.

The collected data was analyzed to illuminate the experiences of deportees transitioning to a life in Tonga. The themes that emerged through the analysis pointed to specific factors that either helped or hindered their transition and reintegration into Tongan society. Themes included reintegration, family support or lack thereof, religious social support, spiritual growth and change, the stigma of being a deportee, and dealing with Tongan shame, or ma. Because the themes surround the superordinate theme of reintegration, the outline of the discussion is based on the relationship of each theme to reintegration.

Figure 5 presents the factors that lead to reintegration for deportees. The web of concepts displays the complexity of deportee experiences. At least two concepts were found to be in conflict with reintegration. Family, as discussed below, was a strong means of reintegration but also of exclusion. Similarly, religion was also found to be a strong means of reintegration into
the community, especially as it related to the culture and daily life of Tongans, yet it too served as an instrument of exclusion.
Figure 5. Reintegration concept map.
Family. Migrants who have maintained transnational relationships over time and space have support when they are deported back to their homeland (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, the interviewed Tongan deportees left at an early age, especially when compared to their Salvador (Coutin, 2013) and Jamaican (Golash-Boza, 2014) counterparts. On average, the Tongan deportees had left Tonga at four years old. Thus, they were too young to maintain contact with family and friends in Tonga. Given the technology and means that were available when the deportees were that age, it was also challenging for their parents to maintain strong ties. Furthermore, only Mohokoi and Fehi reported having returned to Tonga since migrating to the U.S. This additionally demonstrates the difficulties that the migrants experienced in maintaining ties with family.

The family plays the most important role in the reintegration of the deportee. Gideon (2007) states, “The family is perhaps the most important single agent of socialization in all societies” (p. 212). As the center of Tongan life, it is no surprise that the family is expected to be the first line of assistance. As noted in the literature, social support increases individuals’ well-being, including general and psychological well-being (Cullen, 1994; Johnson Listwan, Colvin, Hanley, & Flannery, 2010). The support that deportees receive from family provides appropriate coping mechanisms that are important in responding to straining life events (Agnew, 1999), such as deportation to an unfamiliar country.

Indeed, Fehi and other deportees who received support from family benefited tremendously. Fehi’s brother picked him up from the airport and provided immediate assistance and counsel. He also received a parcel of his father’s land despite being the youngest of 12
siblings. Fehi has farmed that parcel for years, providing food for his family. He described all the familial support as pieces of a puzzle put together for him to reintegrate. These family connections led to Fehi’s reintegration being smoother than for those who have no such connections.

These findings highlight the importance of family and the ability of family connectedness to overcome some of the barriers faced by deportees. Both Fehi and Misi own land passed down from their fathers, and thus have a connection to the island. The land is their basis for capital; they use it to grow crops and raise animals. Land also serves as collateral for a mortgage or to secure a loan (Crawford, 2001) according to the Land Act of 1976. All in all, the capital available from family land presents great opportunities for deportees to be accepted by the community.

Furthermore, family connectedness leads to a successful reintegration of the deportee. The instrumental social support that Fehi experienced when he received land gave him an opportunity to integrate into the community because of the status he attained by holding that land, as well as the status he holds by being a provider for his family. Traditionally, land is the main source of wealth (Besnier, 2011). If his family had not entrusted him with the land, he would not carry the same social status.

Familial assistance is also foundational to helping deportees overcome barriers to reintegration. Families provide a support group that can speak to the noncriminality and trustworthiness of the individual (Meisenhelder, 1982). Without the backing of the family, the community will base their perceptions of the individual on the fact that he or she was deported to Tonga. Thus, the family is in a key position, because when they welcome the individual as a
noncriminal, others will begin to do so as well (Taylor, 2016). The family’s perception affects that of the community, which in turn influences deportees’ self-perception. The ex-offender is more likely to internalize his or her identity as a noncriminal when viewed by family and community in this way (Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004). The road to reintegration into the community is blocked when the families of deportees continually view them as criminal and dangerous. Thus, the family plays a major role in how deportees are perceived by the community, and the access that deportees can receive from the community based on that perception.

The findings also highlight the significance of family assistance within a holistic approach. In addition to the help of family members in Tonga, the support of parents, siblings, and children from the U.S. was found to be significant. The Tongan family network extends to several generations and branches (Hafoka et al., 2013), as seen in the role that cousins played in being some deportees’ first support system.

However, the results of this study show that family falls on both sides of reintegration: it can also block or hinder the reintegration of deportees into the community. Indeed, the lack of family support was a key factor hindering the participants’ reintegration.

Furthermore, family separation from members remaining in the U.S. was a cause of emotional distress for all of the deportees. Ten out of the twelve participants were separated from their children, who remained in the U.S. For a few of them, deportation produced family dissolution because returning back to the U.S. seemed impossible. Studies have shown that maintaining family ties during incarceration is associated with lower recidivism (Taylor, 2016). Although they were free in Tonga, the deportees still considered deportation as a sentence,
because they were not free to visit their families in the U.S. Deportees shared how visits from their family were seldom, nevertheless beneficial for their well-being. Family visits are seldom based on factors that include the distance and difficulty of traveling to Tonga. These difficulties include financial worries because of the costs to travel and the time taken away from work and family.

Deportation disregards family relationships and erases ties to a homeland (Coutin, 2013). The family is a central unit that supports reintegration, and its separation causes psychological and emotional stress that Tongan deportees must experience without available social services. According to Mohokoi, deportation to Tonga means, “You’re deported for life.” The chances of being reunited with family seem non-existent, and the thought of being separated from family for life can have a huge impact on deportees’ well-being and outlook on life. The interruption of family life for deportees strains their relationships with their family, which studies have shown to cause high levels of stress (Gideon, 2007). When deportees experience high levels of stress because of strained relationships with family, it poses reintegration challenges.

In the study, multiple deportees reported having family members in Tonga who did not support them because they had been deported. The deportee stigma is discussed below, but it is important to mention that having close family members in Tonga did not necessarily mean that the participants received any kind of help from them. Several deportees were kicked out of their family’s home because they were not trusted, thus reinforcing the deportee stigma. Losing that family relationship also meant losing the connections they had with the community.
Furthermore, the deportees reported numerous instances of informal punishments by family. The shame from the community is one informal sanction that they discussed extensively; another was being punished by their family. Ngata’s family in the U.S. stopped sending remittances and did not answer his phone calls. Hiva mentioned being kicked out of the house by his family because he was a deportee. When asked about her children in the U.S., Mana said, “Oh, they hate me. They don’t want anything to do with me. It’s like the big barrier.” These informal punishments hurt the deportees as well as their reintegration. Essentially, the punishments inflicted by the family demonstrate the deportee’s worth. When rejected or shunned, or when animosity is felt towards the deportee, this is evidence of the family treating the latter poorly because of the harm he or she has brought upon the family. In Tongan culture, when bad behavior brings shame upon an individual, the family experiences the shame as well (Morton, 1996). To respond to the shame, the family turns to punishing by cutting off contact, kicking deportees out of the house, and no longer providing moral or financial support. This is an attempt to clear their name of the negative connotations associated with a deportee.

The stereotypes of deportees, even ones shared by the participants, paint a picture of violent, corrupt, and immoral people. This objectification is ascribed to a deportee like a tag, which leads to further ostracizing after the formal sanctions. Deportees are not viewed as people but as objects to be acted upon. This dehumanization permeates their experience and blocks options that can be supportive of their reintegration. The degradation of deportees has been experienced by deportees in different forms.
Ngata’s was a provider for his family. He had a great job in the U.S. working for a large oilfield services company. After being deported, however, he became dependent on his family. Ngata shared in his interview that his son sent him $2,000. In a short period of time, the roles of provider and dependent were reversed, and Ngata was relying on his son to take care of him thousands of miles away. He shared what this meant to him: “I’m giving up my son. Giving up, I had given up being a father to my son.” This struggle highlights two roles: first, the role of provider for the family, and second, the role of father to his child. Regarding the latter, his son became a provider for him; during the interview, this statement brought him to tears. The realization of the role of becoming a receiver and a dependent shocked Ngata. This experience was not exclusive to him, but one that he was willing to share. As pointed out by some deportees, many other deportees receive remittances but only a few reported to be receivers. This seems to show that deportees were not likely to share that their families were sending money to them in Tonga, but did not hold back in sharing that other deportees were on the receiving end.

In a similar vein, Misi described receiving remittances and using them to take care of family in Tonga. He commented, “Cuz my people [family] they send money and I would freely give aye, I want to help out. And I knew, I had a feeling it [living with the family] wasn’t working so that was, I didn’t think that people were capable of so straight forward and they didn’t care how I thought, how I tried to help out.” In this example, Misi indicated that he had used the remittances he received from family in the U.S. to help out family in Tonga, but was still asked to leave the home. Though he was not the sender, Misi’s family in Tonga benefited from the
remittances. Yet, even as the receiver and giver of remittances, Misi’s relationship with his family was based on their perception of him.

**Housing.** Research shows that housing is one of the main hurdles of reintegration (Matraux, Roman, & Cho, 2008). However, none of the deportees reported having any difficulty finding housing. Furthermore, while many deportees moved between different addresses, and some were kicked out of their family’s homes, none reported homelessness. Homelessness does not exist in Tonga. Everyone has a home and a roof to sleep under. This is perhaps due to the communitarianism of the country, which looks out for the well-being of individuals. Hiva shared that he made a friend on the plane, and this person took him home and provided housing. He later regarded this friend as family. It is difficult to comprehend the compassion that Tongans have in ensuring everyone has a home, while simultaneously stigmatizing the same people. The reintegrative shaming theory points to the social bonds that can restore an individual after committing an offence. Within the Tongan community, the social bonds are a foundation of a communitarian society, which effects are presented in instances of reintegration of those who are shamed and ostracized.

**Religion.** Some of the behaviors in one country may not be socially acceptable in another. To reiterate Cassarino’s (2004) statement, the home country determines the reintegration process and shapes expectations. There is motivation for deportees to join social groups or establish memberships in religion, as this helps to develop and maintain an individual’s sense of belonging (Tajfel, 1982).
Although religion is a great source to find a sense of purpose and a meaning in life, the findings reveal that a strong religious community can also provide much needed support and encouragement for deportees. In addition to being a part of the Tongan culture, religion plays a major role in providing social networks and educational opportunities, as it does for Tongans migrating to the U.S. (Maron & Connell, 2008). The interviewees used religion as a coping mechanism when dealing with deportation and reintegration. Ngata’s second Sunday in Tonga was spent looking for a church, “like back in the States.” Considering the things he did back in the U.S. helped him to feel that connection though he was in Tonga. He also sought out a church where English was spoken, pointing out the connection to the U.S. as well as an opportunity to find English-speaking members.

Tapu’s reintegration through church involved having his grandfather and father as stalwarts and pioneers of their LDS church in his village before migrating to the U.S. Tapu’s connection, or hohoko, to two respected men in his church gave him an advantage in reintegrating. This was a combination of religious and community support and acceptance because of the social standings of his father and grandfather. Thus, the church affiliation on which Tapu relied for his reintegration was based on the social and political positions of his predecessors (Besnier, 2011).

Evident in the results are not only the difficulties of reintegrating, but also the prevalence of church affiliation and attendance among deportees. Regardless of their level of spiritual conviction or behavior contrary to Christian beliefs, the interviewees still attended church and regarded religion as important. This supports Carlson’s (2014) finding that Tongan gang members
observed religious practice on Sunday regardless of their position and activities during the week. While church affiliation and attendance were found to be common among the deportees in the present study, however, only a few of them discussed the confidence they gained by being given great responsibilities in their church. Faumalila, Misi, and Hiva reported having some responsibility in their congregation, which was an indication to them that they were starting to be accepted among church members. The callings held by deportees are akin to the reintegrative shaming model practiced in other collectivist societies (Braithwaite, 1989). The responsibilities in church become the stake in conformity to be accepted into the community through interconnections among families, church members, and coworkers (Charles, 2010). This was also manifested in the confidence these deportees had to branch out and make connections with others in the community.

When they are accepted by church members, deportees begin to build social networks in their congregations (Lim & Putnam, 2010). For instance, Hiva carried several responsibilities, giving him the confidence and the built-in network that church support provided. Having a network with shared beliefs and values creates communication and connection outside of the church network. Furthermore, studies have found that people who perceive themselves to be in the same category as others are more motivated to provide support to other members of the group (Haslam, Reicher, & Levine, 2012).

In a recent study, it was observed that assistance from faith-based organizations required deportees to convert to the religion of those organizations (Boodram, 2018). Because religion is a central part of Tongan culture, deportees already have a religious organization to which they
can turn upon arrival. The Tonga Service Center, operated by the LDS church, provides employment-related and social services and resources. Hiva and Mohokoi had received support from the Tonga Service Center and were enrolled in an online program that would lead to certificates and degrees. Though the reports of the deportees using the Tonga Service Center for help varied, there were clear individual connections to the Center that were also related to the religious connections.

Faumalila’s experience links family and religious support for a positive reintegration. He is the first known Tongan deportee to return to the U.S. After 21 years spent as a deportee in Tonga, Faumalila filed his Waiver of Inadmissibility and was granted a visa in 2017. As shown in the findings, he referred multiple times to the religious assistance and spiritual changes he made in his life. He also mentioned the motivation his son in the U.S. gave him to make the necessary changes, as well as the support he received from his wife, children, and aunt in Tonga.

Like family, religion was also a global theme situated on both sides of the reintegration. Some occurrences in the data presented religion as a means to ostracize. For example, Kuta shared that on her first Sunday in church, she was shunned by a woman in the congregation who questioned why she wore a tupenu (wrapped garment, usually worn by males) and referred to her as a male. Furthermore, Misi stayed with a highly religious family but was shortly asked to leave. He also felt excluded by the church: “They think we are not worthy enough...they don’t think we can carry out our callings in church.” These examples demonstrate the rejections that come from one of the strongest pathways of reintegration. The ostracism of deportees at church challenges their sense of belonging and self-esteem. The group doing the ostracizing is one on
which deportees heavily rely for social support. Deportees rely on their support because of the
adjustments they are making in their lives. Bandura’s (1977) notion of self-efficacy establishes
two aspects: the belief that people have about the ability to change, and the belief that the
change will be beneficial. Those with high self-efficacy or self-esteem will be more enthusiastic
or more likely to attempt to change. However, when deportees attempt to change through
religion and are ostracized, their self-esteem is negatively affected. All in all, as an institution,
churches in Tonga do not provide the support necessary for reintegration. As several deportees
emphasized in their interviews, church leaders can do more. For example, religious
denominations could provide a representative to assist in their arrival or in their introduction to
a local congregation. As a large part of Tongan life, religion at the macro level has the capacity to
provide instrumental assistance for deportees.

From Misi’s experiences above, we can see that a trajectory exists that ends in a positive
reintegration into the Tongan society. He was kicked out of the house, experienced intense
shaming and stigma, yet he ended up carrying out multiple church responsibilities and
maintaining a steady job. Comparable, Tapu’s experiences have also reached integration. His
pathway also included religious social support and acceptance as well as strong family ties and
care. He, too experiences a stable job and religious responsibilities. These examples illustrate a
pathway to reintegration that not all deportees experienced. In Akataha’s struggles, it was
apparent that family support was lacking and there were no strong ties to a religious group. His
exclusions into groups in the village were evident when he shared experiences of fighting other
men. His pathway, filled with marginalization, lack of familial and religious support, kept him from a full and successful reintegration.

**Acculturation.** Research has shown that deportees become detested upon arrival in their homeland because they have been identified and labeled as failures and criminals (Headley, 2006). As stated throughout the findings, the deportees did experience this type of treatment in Tonga. They became the “suitable enemy” and the scapegoat for the social ills of the country. Kuta described the stereotypes of being a deportee as follows: “They think you’re a bad person. They think you steal. They think that you do drugs. They think you might hurt them in their sleep. They don’t trust you at all.” This stereotype is attached to deportees because they are easily identified by the way they dress and speak.

An important facet related to this topic that has yet be discussed is the importance of acculturation. Not surprisingly, many of the deportees struggled with the language and the culture in Tonga. Because many had left at a very young and impressionable age, they were able to pick up English, which eventually became their first language. Tongan deportees, like deportees in other nations, often struggle to reintegrate because of limited or lack of language abilities (Moniz, 2004; Brisbois, et al., 2016). Tongan language skills affect those with whom deportees can communicate and from whom they can learn. This also impacts the connections they can make outside of their intimate circle. Furthermore, language abilities are an indication of social identity (Gelman & Roberts, 2017). Several deportees were easily identified by natives because of their limited language abilities, which led to social isolation and shame (Gibney, 2013). As in the experience of several deportees, including Misi, they thought they were fluent with the
Tongan they had learned in the U.S. They soon realized that they were readily identifiable because they were not proficient enough, or they spoke a different dialect or with an accent.

The best predictor of psychological and sociocultural adjustment of all acculturation behaviors is language (Masgoret & Gardner, 1999). Hence, the deportees were distressed when they did not have the language skills that would best help them in finding a job or being accepted by others. Sometimes, deportees learned that the Tongan language abilities they had from the U.S. were not sufficient, which sometimes contradicted what they believed. Without basic language skills, the deportees struggled to fit in even if they looked like other Tongans.

Deportees in this study had spent between 13 and 52 years in the U.S. Migrating at a young age combined with the amount of time they lived in the U.S. meant that they had adapted to U.S. culture. All participants came from large metropolitan cities or from the outskirts of those cities. Furthermore, all deportees experienced culture shock in various ways and to varying degrees. Many immigrants who move to the U.S. acculturate to the American culture, including replacing their traditional diets with low-cost convenience foods that are widely available (Ayala, Baquero, & Klinger, 2008). It is not a surprise that many of the deportees in this study reported struggling with adapting to the food in Tonga. They mentioned fast food restaurants by name and discussed places where they would hang out with friends and eat. These stories express the continual connections that the Tongan deportees made with food establishments in the U.S. However, these connections were not strictly to those establishments; instead, they mentally took them back to the U.S.
The culture shock experienced by deportees was not limited to language and food. Many basic necessities were not available to them in Tonga. One deportee discussed the difficulties in adjusting to the lack of electricity. Today, it may be unexpected not to have access to electricity but it is still common in some households in Tonga. This is a considerable adaptation from American life. Electricity helps to manage food, heat, water, energy, entertainment, and communication, among others. The deportees had lived in the U.S. for over a decade and had to adapt to things such as not having a refrigerator to store food, or not having an oven to cook it. They also had to transition from only buying food from a supermarket or restaurant, to preparing many meals from the farm; this includes planting their own vegetables, such as cassava, sweet potato, taro, giant taro, and yams, as well as raising animals (Besnier, 2011). Thus, when the participants first arrived in Tonga, they were shocked to see the pigs and chickens run freely. However, they have since learned and experienced for themselves that the animals are raised for food.

The deportees were also shocked to learn that homes may not have hot water. As one expressed, he had to start a fire to heat up water, and then carry that water to the outhouse to take a hot shower. This is a different experience from the U.S., where hot water is viewed as an essential service and a right. The interviewees were dependent on services such as water and electricity to complete everyday tasks, and now had to adapt to the lifestyle in Tonga of cold showers or fetching water from the village rainwater tank. This contrast highlights the difficulty that deportees face when their way of life is transformed by their deportation.
Furthermore, the deportees also had to adapt to the family, cultural, and religious responsibilities and the intersection of the three at a single event. An example shared by several deportees was their lack of knowledge on how to fulfill their responsibilities at a putu, or funeral. The presence of family is obligatory at a funeral to show respect to the deceased and to perform familial obligations. Even the death of a distant family member requires one to be in mourning and to wear black to signify this mourning (Besnier, 2011). The interviewees reported asking family members in the U.S. to send money so they could fulfill their family and cultural responsibilities at a funeral.

Though the Tongan culture emphasizes birth, marriage and death as important events in life, only funerals were discussed widely by study participants. When discussing family obligations being carried out, several deportees shared their experiences of attending funerals and asking family members in the U.S. to send remittances for the funeral. Marriage and birth are important social obligations for Tongans to attend and lend support but funerals seem to carry more weight and importance for the deportees.

Tongan deportees dealt with the stigma and shame by accepting social conditions and adopting the norms, the language, and the culture of Tonga. Acculturation success was dependent on how well and sometimes how quickly they embraced theanga fakatonga, the Tongan way. This included accepting social conditions such things as animals roaming free; the lack of hot showers, fast food restaurants, movie theaters, and stores not open on Sundays; having only two channels on the television, and other changes. By fulfilling their obligations to family and church, the deportees were able to gain access to other networks. Hiva discussed the
outcomes of taking care of familial and cultural duties: “I work for, as a salesperson, for this phone company. And I built my own network. So I’m more confident, even though people know me that I was deported, but they kind of have that respect for me.” Hiva, sharing his take on being able to reintegrate into the Tongan community, had the ability to branch out and expand his network despite being a deportee. He overcame the deportee tag, as evidenced by the position he had at his job, the responsibilities he had in church, and the social network he established.

**Employment.** Along with Hiva, several other deportees were successful in holding a steady job, including in agriculture, communications, maintenance, tourism, and business. This is a strong indicator that these individuals were stable, and were connected to at least their job and coworkers. It is also a good measure of how much of the provider role they played in their family. However, not all deportees with jobs showed stability: for instance, a deportee who worked in the public safety industry was fired and struggled to find jobs around town. He had been working in the tourism industry for several months before the interview. Another participant was in the food service industry, and was selling food to order from her home. This job brought in an unstable income, but the deportee was innovative in utilizing skills learned in the U.S.

At least two other deportees worked in the tourism industry, utilizing their English skills to their advantage. All jobs besides those involving tourists entail speaking Tongan. Facebook pages and personal websites are created to advertise English jobs. However, the stability of these jobs depends on many factors, including need, season, foreign relations, economy, and other aspects outside the workers’ control. The pathway to reintegration is strongly connected to
employment; therefore, the deportees made efforts to step out of their comfort zone to obtain a job.

In their interviews, the deportees reported that they had had steady jobs in the U.S. This included being a property maintenance manager, electrician, librarian, clerk, teamster, and longshoreman. These jobs were steady and paid fairly well. In contrast, in Tonga they worked in the service sector and received low pay. This is comparable to research that shows that migrants are concentrated in low-paying jobs with precarious working conditions (Datta, Mcilwaine, Evans, Herbert, May, & Wills, 2007). Nonetheless, although many of them were overqualified, the deportees made the most of the jobs they had secured.

**Foreigners in their own homeland.** The deportees struggled to accept Tonga as their home, particularly after learning of Faumalilia’s legitimate return to the U.S. This gave them hope of their own possible return “home.” They expressed the phenomenon of “psychological homelessness,” which refers to the feelings of not belonging in one’s home country (Negy, Reig-Ferrer, Gabroit, & Ferguson, 2014). While they had been deported to Tonga, it was clear that many experienced cognitive dissonance by attempting to assimilate into Tongan culture while holding on to their American identity.

In this vein, many deportees referred to the U.S. as home. Hiva stated, “I struggled you know, because there wasn’t really much support from my mom back home because we kind of ran into a lot of issues.” Similarly, Mana commented: “Never take anything for granted back home. Cuz out here you don’t get it, like anything back home. Simple things like food and clothes and stuff. Just all those good necessities that you get back home on a daily basis.” Hiva had been
in Tonga for 18 years and Mana for 12 years, yet they both still referred to the U.S. as home. This clearly illustrates their struggle to fully integrate in Tonga.

Hiva had lived in the U.S. for 13 years but, as mentioned above, had been in Tonga for 18 years at the time of the interview. Although he had spent more years in Tonga than he had in the U.S., Tonga was still not “home” to him, despite the fact that he had acquired the Tongan language. Only two deportees in this study had lived in Tonga longer than Hiva. Throughout the interviews, none of the study participants referred to Tonga as their home. Each time “home” was mentioned, it was referring to the U.S. For example when deportees spoke of memories, friends, or events that happened back “home”, it was a place in the U.S.

The interviewees’ feeling of being foreign in their own home was heavily influenced by their welcome to Tonga. Namely, this feeling arose from acculturation issues and the treatment they received from the people of Tonga. Faumalila shared, “Um, trying to get along with the people here because down here as soon as they hear that you’re a deportee, they’re like thinking of you as another culture, another culture or matakali kehe kita ia he taimi koia (a different ethnicity at that time).” He indicated that he had been “othered” by the Tongans because of his deportee tag. Yet, a sense of belonging is essential for the individual to start considering Tonga his or her home.

Besides these issues, the deportees also still considered the U.S. home because of their emotional and family ties. The concept of home is fluid and sometimes shifts. Home is conceptualized and experienced (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011), so its definition is adaptable and can also be manifold (Feng & Breitung, 2017). In this study, the deportees’ home could be the U.S. as
well as Tonga. However, the aforementioned factors of family ties, memories, and a sense of belonging, among others, are all important in defining a home. Tapu’s concept of home demonstrates this fluidity:

“My wife and my kids, they are all US citizens and they can leave and we can go to another country and try to do something better. But for me, the changes I’ve seen here, my whole view of being Tongan has changed. So, I get to put them (Tapu’s children) in school here and teach them the culture, the language, and everything. They get to grow up here in Tonga. They can leave here if they want, if they don’t want to be part of the business – they have that choice. Tonga is going to be their home. So, how I see Tonga and the changes, I didn’t see it when I was living in the States. Tonga could be a home. All I knew was the States, America. But now, I love the fact that we live in Tonga.”

This conceptualization of home includes the social ties and the cultural lessons experienced by Tapu’s children. This was not true for all deportees. However, Tapu’s above statement highlights his children’s emotional, social, and cultural ties with Tonga. He stated that Tonga was their home, and because of the ties he had to his children, it could also be another home for himself besides the U.S. Thus, along with experiences in certain places, an attachment or sense of belonging helps to establish the country deportees call home.

Shame and stigma. Comments like “the deportee tag was a negative tag. You’re less than the worst person in the world,” suggest the mortification in deportees’ experiences. Goffman (1963) proposes two types of stigma: the stigma of character traits and the stigma of group identity. The deportees reported being stigmatized because they were sent back to Tonga after
a criminal conviction. The stigma attached to the deportee focuses on deportees as a group. However, the impact of stigma on deportees as a group still has a strong influence on the individual’s character. Furthermore, Goffman’s stigma of group identity can be seen in the following comment: “when they say ‘deportee’ they automatically think you’re dealing drugs, or you’re going to steal their car, or thinking about a gang member in the States.” When an individual is stigmatized, it is because the label of being a deportee places him or her in the group of deportees.

The shame and stigma attached to the deportees were evidently strong factors leading them away from reintegration. The Tongan culture is a shame culture and values group relationships (Helu, 1993). Thus, the actions of an individual are tied to the group (Morton, 1996). This is a significant reason why deportees were shunned by their family in Tonga: their deportation had brought shame on the family. The interviewees shared many experiences of being shamed and teased by local Tongans. For instance, Akataha pointed out, “They just make fun of us because we are deportees.” Kuta shared the same attitude: “And they make fun of us deportees, like all the time.” The teasing of deportees brings up the underlying antagonism towards them. When they are teased, it is to point out that they are different and not accepted into the community.

Faumalila shared the difficulty of disputing the stereotype of being violent in handling this teasing: “Well, before I got to know how anga fakatonga, fakakata (Tongan way, joking) and stuff, oh man I used to red light (fight), you know what I mean? But then it took me about a year to get to know how the Tongans like to joke around. But you know, they like to joke around with
some of the deepest things. And I learn to cope with it, you know, because back home, that’s feelings. But out here, if you stop to know our *anga fakatonga* (Tongan way), then I guess you’ll be alright, but yeah. Man, I used to red light (fight) all the time.” Faumalila learned that the teasing was part of the culture; it took some time for him to realize that when he responded by fighting, it confirmed the stereotype of deportees as violent and criminal. This also points to the antagonism that deportees experience when the locals incite violence to further stigmatize them. Faumalila expressed that he had to learn that not falling into the traps would help him overcome the teasing. As discussed in the previous sections, shame and stigma can pervade any aspect of the deportee’s life and make it difficult.

The reintegrative shaming experienced by Tongan deportees seemed to have started off as disintegrative shaming. However, the examples of Tapu and Hiva highlight the trajectory of a reintegration that has taken time. As a deportee of nearly twenty years at the time of interview, both demonstrate that reintegration was possible through pathways such as family and religion. Over time, they were able to gain confidence in the culture and the language. They have also established connections in the community as well as in their religious congregations. Contrary, Vaka and Kuta continued to struggle with handling shame and stigma. They had been in Tonga for less than seven years at the time of their interviews. This underlines a reintegrative process that occurs over time. Their position and issues in ten years may be different from the experiences up to the time of their interview. However, at the current time of analysis, the findings point to a stronger and more successful reintegration for those deportees who have spent more years in Tonga.
CHAPTER VI

POLICY IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

Based on their own experiences, the participants in this study expressed their recommendations for future deportees. These are analyzed and discussed below, along with recommendations based on the analysis of the interviews. This chapter also proposes directions for future research and discusses the limitations of the present study.

Recommendations. The findings of this study shed light on the experiences, positive and negative, of deportee reintegration in Tonga. The emerging themes point to particular areas, agencies, and organizations that require improvement and action. Therefore, the following presents recommendations to assist the reintegration of deportees.

1. A coordinated approach should be established through the formation of a committee that involves representatives from a variety of agencies, including but not limited to the Ministry of Police, Prisons, and Fire Services; the Ministry of Education and Training; the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Tourism; the Ministry of Labor, Commerce & Industries; and faith-based leaders. These agencies are important to the reintegration of deportees because they can offer necessary support and services. Working together as a committee would provide a holistic approach that would be the most beneficial for deportees, as their needs would be met at the beginning of their deportation sentence. Forming this committee would compel the agencies to ensure that they are equipped to fulfill their
missions and goals. This would entail confirming that services such as counseling, employment, and educational resources are available.

2. The Tongan government must address social dislocation by meeting deportees at the airport. The literature and the findings provide many accounts of deportees arriving in a country which they find unfamiliar without anyone to introduce them to their new home. The old adage “Well begun is half done” emphasizes the importance of a strong support network for deportees on arrival. The physical presence of a representative of the Tongan government would communicate to the deportee that there is help.

3. A committee established to assist the reintegration of returned migrants should direct deportees to the proper social service providers. Deportees need group support, mental health and emotional counseling, employment tools and resources, and educational opportunities. Underutilized resources, which include civil society organizations (CSO) such as the Tonga Service Center (LDS) and the Salvation Army, should be used in coordination with state resources. These two CSOs are church affiliated organizations and also represent an opportunity for deportees to make religious connections. These organizations do not require a church membership and offer different services, including education, employment, and counseling services. The CSOs should be used in conjunction with government resources. The government receives a three week notice before a deportee is sent back to Tonga. This is enough time to coordinate the services for deportees.

4. A reintegration plan should be created and should include the acculturation of deportees. Deportees left at a young age and would benefit from learning the proper Tongan
language in addition to the spoken Tongan in the community. Many of them spoke Tongan as their first language before a gradual loss of proficiency. Indeed, deportees experience first language attrition, which is the phenomenon of losing one’s first language due to using another language for many years. A cultural class in conjunction with a language class would help deportees to understand the norms and expected behaviors in Tonga. It would also assist them in connecting with other people and groups in the community.

5. Religious groups and leaders should play a central part in the reintegration plan. As the findings have shown, all deportees are connected to a church and sometimes use it as a coping mechanism. Church leaders should work together with government officials in a coordinated approach so that they are also aware of the deportees who are being sent back to Tonga. Church representatives should be at the airport to meet deportees as well, so that transition into a local congregation is early and smooth. This would also give deportees a religious contact if they have any concerns in their first few months. Being accepted into a group helps deportees with their sense of belonging (Tajfel, 1982), which consequently increases their chances of being accepted into other groups in the community.

6. An educational workshop should be established for Tongan migrants in the U.S., particularly for legal permanent residents (LPR) or green card holders. Some Tongan lawyers and other immigration law experts have held seminars briefing Tongan migrants on their rights as legal immigrants in the U.S. However, the frequency of these briefings should increase because of the availability of Tongan lawyers and Juris Doctorates, as well as the steady number of deportees to Tonga. Several deportees mentioned that they did not know their rights in
immigration holding facilities, or that they were not U.S. citizens. Furthermore, many of the deportees expressed that they were not aware of the law that they could be deported for past offenses, or that they did not know that LPRs can be deported. These are examples of the matters on which the general Tongan population in the U.S. should be informed, especially if they are not yet citizens. The aforementioned briefings would educate Tongans on the laws of the land and encourage them to be law-abiding people.

7. Reintegration plans for deportees must involve family, both in Tonga and in the U.S. As was found in this study, family has an invaluable impact on reintegration. Within the three weeks after the Tongan government receives a deportation alert from the U.S. government, agencies and families must work together to coordinate and connect family members who can provide assistance, bonding, and immediate support.

8. The U.S. must reconsider powerful and unfair immigration policies that deport migrants, particularly those who have already served their sentence in a U.S. criminal justice institution. Many deportees have been law abiding lawful permanent residents (LPR) for years after their conviction and completed prison sentence, yet are separated from family members because of harsh retroactive, discriminatory policies. Children of deported Tongans who remain in the U.S. are natural born citizens and current policies do not take into account the impact this has on the family members. The penalty of deportation for LPRs who have served their prison sentence represents an unfair and biased system that continues to target and “other” immigrants to the U.S.
Limitations. One of the possible limitations of this study is that the collected data included the deportees’ retrospective narratives of experiences that had sometimes occurred over 20 years ago. At the time of the interviews, deportees had been back in Tonga for between 3 and 21 years. Furthermore, they recollected events and feelings for this project, and expressed these in a specific context. However, their feelings and experiences may have differed across different sociopolitical moments that have occurred in the Kingdom of Tonga. It is therefore significant to consider the sociopolitical context in which the study took place and the socio-historical context throughout the range of the deportees’ experiences.

It is also important to take into consideration the purpose of the study. This points towards the exploration of how deportee’s experienced the transition into Tonga. Deportees shared their feelings and lived experiences of this transition and the factors that have led to their current situations. Ultimately, the study does not allow, nor was it concerned with, drawing conclusions on causality or establishing evidence–based practices.

Because Tonga is a small country, issues of anonymity and confidentiality are a problem. The population of deportees is so small that sharing details in this write-up may identify participants to Tongan readers. Even though precautions have been taken, some deportees may be identified through their personal stories. It was difficult to obtain information without being too intrusive and making the participant feel uncomfortable. To this end, connecting and building a rapport with participants was fundamental. By building a relationship before and during the interviews through cultural concepts such as tauhi va and hohoko, discussing sensitive topics came naturally because of the space and relationship that was nurtured and respected.
Another limitation of this study is that all participants were from the U.S. Although it would be interesting to interview deportees from other countries, this sample reflects the prevalence of U.S. deportees compared to those from Australia and New Zealand.

This study followed the guidelines provided by the Washington State University Institutional Review Board (WSUIRB). The WSUIRB reviewed the proposal for this research and exempted the study from human subject research guidelines. Given the direct contact and sensitive nature of the research, a possible explanation as to why the WSUIRB made this choice could be that deportees have already been rejected and ostracized by the community, and being interviewed by a researcher about their experiences will not further stigmatize them. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point during the interview, for any reason.

**Future research.** The following presents several suggestions for future research based on the findings of the current study as well as the current literature. This exploratory research using IPA to study Tongan deportee experiences is the first of its kind. First, future research should duplicate this study and include deportees from other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand. It should further explore how religion and family influence reintegration. Pathways such as religion and family could be tested with a group of deportees. In addition, the state- and religiously sponsored services should be explored regarding their effectiveness in assisting deportees. Another suggestion is to compare Tongan deportees with other Pacific Islander deportees in terms of their experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, an important aspect that is under-researched in this field is the experiences of female deportees. Women experience a
different stigma than men do, and are a difficult population to reach and to study. Research would benefit from considering their experiences and their pathways to reintegration.

In addition, resiliency is a complex but important concept that should be researched. Most studies have focused on outcomes and pathways of deportees, while no attention has been paid to the response and resiliency regarding experiencing a family separation and an unfamiliar country as a deportee. Further research examining protective and risk factors would aid in identifying developmental pathways for reintegration and disintegration.

Concerning the well-being of deportees, it would be beneficial to study the long-term ramifications of deportation for the individual as well as for migration to the U.S. and the deportation trends to Tonga. The participants in this study had been in Tonga for between 3 and 21 years. Thus, a longitudinal study would also be valuable to examine the changes over time and the reintegration pathways in the future.

Ten out of the twelve respondents in this study were separated from their children. Further research should look into the experiences of children of deportees. The literature on children of incarcerated parents is extensive, but the research on children of deportees is scant. Unlike the former, the latter have reduced chances of visiting parents because of difficulty in traveling to Tonga. Research on this topic should consider how they fare in school and how they cope with the separation. It is important to learn about the resources available to children from the state and schools. Furthermore, given that not all children of deported parents are minors, it is also important to explore the coping mechanisms used by their adult children and their sources
of support. Examining the differences between adults and children would help develop future assistance for children of deported parents.

Furthermore, the parents of deportees are an overlooked group in this study. Future research could explore parents’ experiences of migration, purposes of migration, family relationships, and changing attitudes over time. This particular research is important because parents can share their perspective on the support they have provided deported children while they remain in the U.S. As first-generation migrants, they have insight into the reasons why they moved and can present their views on the cultural practices that have been passed on in their family after migration, and those that have not.

Because the home country determines the reintegration process for returning migrants (Cassarino, 2004), it would be beneficial to study the expectations of people in the home country. Examining native Tongans’ expectations regarding deportees could be highly beneficial in constructing social services and developing a tailored reintegration plan. Without understanding Tongans’ perceptions on deportees, it would be impossible to equip the latter with the proper tools to overcome those perceptions.

**Conclusion.** The present study has explored the lived experiences of deportees who had returned to Tonga. Twelve deportees sat and shared their stories from the beginning of the deportation process to the day of their meeting with the researcher. The study investigated how they experienced reintegration and what factors positively and negatively affected that experience. The findings demonstrated that religion, family, and familiarity with the Tongan culture played strong roles in their reintegration. However, religion and family also challenged
this process. In addition, stigma was heavily connected to cultural shame, which further complicated deportees’ reintegration. Finally, the deportees’ acculturation highlighted the value of maintaining culture for migrants, and the underlying social functions of shame connected to the unfamiliarity of culture.

Currently, the literature on deportees from the U.S. lacks research from the Pacific islands. This study aimed to fill that gap and to provide recommendations to give deportees the best chance of reintegrating into a country where they are essentially foreign in terms of language and practices. It also provided a framework of the pathways leading deportees to reintegration. As maintained in this study, the success of deportee reintegration can be facilitated by the collaboration of the government, religious groups and leaders, and family.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Deportation Process
Tell me about your deportation process experience?
How were you treated by the US authorities? By the Tongan authorities?
What were your biggest worries throughout the process?
What support or resources were most helpful to you at that time?
What helped you deal with the news of being deported?
How did your family learn about that you were being deported?

Acculturation/ Displacement
How long did you live in USA?
What was your first impression when you arrived in Tonga?
What were your expectations of how you should behave?
Tell me about the language barrier when you arrived.
Did you experience any unpleasant surprises when you first arrived?
What do you miss most about US?
What were some things you found to be shocking when you first arrived?
In your first few months, how easy/ difficult was it to adapt?
Did you feel confusion about your role or identity?
Are there things still make it difficult for you to adapt?
What area some of the things you appreciate?
When you experience negative feelings, how do you cope?
If you didn’t experience the negative feelings, what went so well for you?
What changes happened for you? (Emotional, social, occupational, behavioral, academically?)
Today, are your friends here in Tonga mainly from the US?

Stigma: Experienced Stigma:
Do people ignore you or take you less seriously?
Are you patronized, or treated like a (criminal) because you were deported?
What are the stereotypes of being a deportee?
Do you stay away from social situations, functions, in order to avoid embarrassment?
Would you prefer to keep people from knowing you are a deportee?
Do you think your neighbors, or others in the village have less respect for you because you are a deportee?
Do you think others avoid you because you are a deportee?
Do you think being a deportee has had an effect on how your family is viewed?