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## TONGAN CRIP GANG: A TONGAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

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**‘Esiteli Hafoka**  
Stanford University  
[ehafoka@stanford.edu](mailto:ehafoka@stanford.edu)

**‘Esiteli Hafoka** is the proud daughter of Taniela and Latufuipeka (Hala’ufia) Hafoka, wife of Va’inga Uhamaka, and mother of Sinakilea and Latufuipeka. She received her PhD and MA in Religious Studies from Stanford University, and her BA in Religious Studies and Ancient History from UC Riverside. Her research introduces a novel theoretical approach, angafakafonua as Tongan epistemology, to understand Tongan collective identity in the United States of America.

**Abstract:** This article is an articulation of Tongan angafakafonua (way of the land, culture) as Tongan identity and its (re)makings through religion and gangs in the United States. Based on a section of my doctoral thesis, I examine the influence of the Mormon Church on Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act charges.<sup>1</sup> This article acknowledges that legislators, driven by their Mormon religio-racial ideology, interpreted the legislation in an exclusive manner. They took liberties to explicitly exclude first-generation Tongan Americans based on their preference for street gangs rather than the fraternal organizations associated with the Church. During the period between the settlement of Utah and the RICO trial of Siale Angilau, American-born Tongans of the first generation modified angafakafonua to address the needs of a growing Tongan community in the United States. In the later years of this transitional period, second-Generation Tongan Americans utilized angafakafonua to counteract excessive surveillance by gang task forces, racial profiling, and discriminatory practices employed by the state.

**Keywords:** American-born Tongans; angafakafonua; gangs; RICO Act; Tongan American identity; Utah LDS/Mormon Church

As Tongan *kāinga* (extended family) settle on other *fonua* (land/s) in the diaspora of the United States, long distances away from their ancestral homeland in the south Pacific Ocean, they carry across cultural ways, attitudes, and ways of living. These socio-cultural and socio-spiritual ways of living on the land closely reflect Tongan *angafakafonua* (way of the land, culture). With the rise, however, of second and third generation American-born and raised Tongans who have learned to navigate and live in both worlds—their cultural world and that of their new homeland in the United States — *angafakafonua* embodies identities that reflect stories from their new place of residence. In this article, I unfold a few of those stories by presenting *angafakafonua* as an important part of Tongan identity remade through religious connections and gang memberships (see Hafoka, 2022). As a researcher of contemporary Tongan-American religiosity, and as a part of the Tongan-American diaspora, I have been able to use Tongan approaches like *Talanoa*,<sup>2</sup> and my community networks to gather information from key sources.

When Tongan parents in California grew tired of the crime and violence in their neighborhoods, they would send their children to live with relatives in Utah. They soon discovered, however, that poverty and racism were not exclusive to urban areas.<sup>3</sup> Before the Tongan Crip Gang (TCG) arrived in Utah, Tongans in the Salt Lake City westside suburb of Glendale were associated with the Coconut Connection gang. The transformation from Coconut Connection to TCG happened when the first OG (stands for original gangster) from California arrived in Utah.<sup>4</sup> Miles Kinikini, who grew up in Glendale, was afraid of the LatinX (people of Latin American origin or descent) gangs in his neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> To prove his toughness and join the gang, Kinikini underwent the initiation ritual of getting "jumped in," where he was physically assaulted by gang members.

Finau and Rocky Manatau, who lived in West Valley City, Utah, also feared gangs. The Kearns Town Bloods and Black Mafia Gang targeted Polynesian kids as early as middle school.<sup>6</sup> When their father, Umu Manatau, who worked with the police force, discovered that his sons were involved in a chain of robberies, he was shocked. Finau and Rocky, however, saw gang life as a way to combat their fear of larger gangs. For the Manatau brothers, gang and criminal activity became part and parcel of *angafakafonua*. This process helped bridge the gap between young Tongan Mormon and non-Mormon boys, as they sought to replicate structural hierarchies reminiscent of southern California gang networks and Tongan *kāinga* frameworks within the TCG. They fostered favorable relationships between members, negotiated the boundaries of Tongan-ness in Salt Lake City, and reinforced the benefits of Tongan collective epistemology.

The TCG provided a way for Tongan Americans in southern California to cope with and overcome their socioeconomic struggles through fraternal networks. This

imbrication of gang practices and angafakafonua, however, was often met with frustration from elderly Tongans who could not understand how violence could be a part of their culture. In response, some parents sent their troubled youth to Glendale, a suburb in Utah. Unfortunately, this move introduced gang ideology to the Salt Lake City Tongan American community. In 1991, Glendale became a test site for the Department of Justice's Weed and Seed program, which was the first to legally surveil the Tongan American community and led to profiling of Tongan American gang members.<sup>7</sup>

Salt Lake City also created the Salt Lake Area Gang Project in 1990 and hosted an annual gang conference that highlighted the growing threat of gangs, particularly with the rise of organized crime.<sup>8</sup> Local responses to street gangs utilized federal grants like The Byrne Grant to fund resources for gang-specific task forces.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 1990s, dismantling street gangs became the ambition of the Salt Lake City Police Department (SLCPD), and they identified TCG members through a set of criteria that perpetuated racist tropes.<sup>10</sup>

### **Tongan American is TCG**

During my interview with former Glendale resident and self-identified TCG member, Hala Malohi, he expressed that, "Tongan American, to me, is TCG."<sup>11</sup> Hala recounted his first encounter with the SLCPD, which occurred in 1991 when he was only nine years old. He and other neighborhood kids were at Raging Waters, a water park that he and my brothers often frequented during the summers of 1987 and 1988, as our parents purchased discounted annual passes. While there, Hala and some of the kids decided to compete to see who could break a plastic recycle bin. Hala delivered the final blow, causing the plastic to break into large pieces and the other boys to scatter. Suddenly, two SLCPD officers appeared and slammed Hala face-first into the pavement, causing him to scrape the whole side of his face on the ground. He was arrested and taken to the police station but was released to his parents who were disappointed in their son's actions and sided with the police.

Hala recalled several instances of encountering the SLCPD during his middle school years, when he and a group of Tongan boys walked home on California Street. Despite being on a busy street, they were frequently stopped and questioned by the police. Hala's White friend from the neighborhood was also considered a gang member simply because he walked home with the Tongan boys. Each member of the group held a sign indicating their affiliation with TCG, and even if the sign was untrue, it was taken as a gang cognomen. Hala also noted that his treatment during each arrest was different from his friends', who were all Mormon and received assistance because of their church connections. Hala, however, was a Catholic, and his church friends, mostly LatinX, were also under heavy surveillance by the predominantly Mormon police force.

As a religious outsider in Utah, Hala formed close relationships with other Catholic boys from church, mainly Mexican Catholics who shared similar experiences as second-class citizens. Hala described how he felt excluded by the Church (the Mormon Church) when his friends got into trouble and the Church would not help him out. Hala's experience of being incarcerated taught him about the politics of Utah and how the Church helped its members in precarious situations like his own. In 2006, Hala was arrested and charged with shooting a firearm linked to three different shootings in one night. He had attended a dance with his friend, Hola, and was questioned by officers shortly after the shooting. Hala denied his involvement and offered to take a polygraph test, but the officers claimed to have a witness who corroborated their accusation. At his trial, Hala saw the witness for the first time, a Samoan man from California who was offered a deal by the Gang Task Force in exchange for witness testimony. Hala's friend, Hola, wrote a letter providing Hala with an alibi for the evening, which was delivered to the trial judge by Hola's bishop. This resulted in the District Attorney dropping the charges against Hala.

Hala found that being part of TCG gave him access to a larger Tongan religious group, even though he did not express any explicit desire for inclusion in the Tongan Mormon community. According to Kinikini, Tongan youth gangs created their own secret societies with rituals, dress codes, and oral traditions, which could be seen as a way to appropriate and subvert the elite and powerful secret societies like Freemasons and political parties.<sup>12</sup> The Church's response to Tongan youth gangs, however, was lukewarm as they preferred local leaders to handle gang matters. Despite this, some community members believed that the Church should intervene, as Tongans came to Utah for the Church, and the problems that occurred were happening within the Church itself. The Church's silence and inaction on the matter could be seen as a form of exclusion, as it rescinded its offer of inclusion into the larger body of White Mormonism.

Poverty played a significant role in shaping relationships among Tongan youth in Glendale and other Tongan enclaves around Salt Lake City. With parents working multiple jobs to support their families both in the United States and Tonga, Tongan children were often left at home with elderly family members or older siblings. The Church's welfare programs in Utah were well-known among Tongans, who often received assistance for rent, food, and job placement. Hala mentioned that a neighborhood parent always made sure he and a few non-Mormon neighborhood kids were fed after school and covered registration fees for extracurricular activities. Access for Tongan youth to Church welfare resources was indirect, and their reliance on Mormon friends and family reminded them of their second-class citizenship in Utah. Consequently, Hala and Kepa Maumau, another fellow TCG, resorted to petty crime as a solution to their destitution.

The communal gathering of TCG members was also influenced by social inequality. According to Robert J. Duran, gangs are a result of racial oppression, and their activity levels decrease during times of social movements that challenge inequality and increase during periods of gang suppression.<sup>13</sup> Tim Sullivan observed that the audience at a junior high multicultural performance let out “primal whooping” and “hormonal screaming,” reflecting the makings of gang members among the next generation of Tongan youth enrolled at Glendale Intermediate School.<sup>14</sup> Although many Tongans in Utah were drawn to the street gang lifestyle through popular culture such as music and media during the late 1990s and early 2000s, gang activity in Utah slowed down almost to a stop by 2010. Kepa and Siale Angilau were not members of the Tongan Crip Gang, but they, like many others, grew up romanticizing gang life.<sup>15</sup> The Tongan community in Utah was also compelled to unite, not only under the banner of angafakafonua, but also under the blue flag, as young Tongans felt like second-class citizens in their own city.<sup>16</sup>

Hala attributed the creation of the TCG to microaggressions experienced by People of Color in the Glendale area and surrounding communities. He noted that his older cousins, who were first-generation TCG members, paved the way for he and other young Tongans to follow, much like the original Tongan settlers paved the way for the first wave of Tongan settlers. Hala also pointed out the racism among officers in the Gang Task Force as a reason why TCG members were often conflated with other young Tongan men during family and community events. Young Tongan men in Glendale were subjected to constant harassment by the SLCPD Gang Task Force, who spread the false belief that all Tongan young men in Glendale were associated with the TCG. While distinctions between Tongan gangs in Salt Lake City were often based on geography, they intersected with family ties. Hala recounted a conflict between Tongan Crip Regulators (TCR) in West Valley City and Rose Park members that erupted at the Tongan Wesleyan Methodist church on 400 South. Glendale boys were caught in the middle, as they were related to people on both sides of the conflict. According to Hala, Tongan-on-Tongan conflicts often boiled over at various Tongan events such as rugby games, church dances, and birthday parties. This violence among young Tongan Americans made them targets for the SLCPD Gang Task Force. When asked about other TCG members in his generation, Hala said that many, if not all, were alive and out of prison. He added that his generation of Tongan youth were responsible for the predicament of Tongan men in the next generation who were indicted on Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act charges. The TCG member who testified on April 14 was someone Hala had introduced to the TCG.

A handout distributed by the Salt Lake Area Gang Project (2017), and sponsored by various law enforcement agencies such as the United States Attorney's office, the United States Marshals Service, the Utah Department of Corrections, and the State Bureau of Investigation, defines a gang as "three or more people who form an

allegiance to the exclusion of others and who engage in unlawful, criminal behaviour."<sup>17</sup> The handout also includes a list of gang names and alliances in the Salt Lake area, categorizing the TCG under the "Blood/Crip Gangs" subheading, and grouping other Tongan gangs, such as Tongan Style Gang, Baby Regulators, and Rose Park Family under the "Tongan" heading. The handout also provides identifiers for certain gangs, such as using the number six to represent Norteños and nine to represent 9th West or the Big Dick Gang. The handout also includes a section on "Getting Out of Gangs Staying Out of Gangs," which suggests that individuals should "Try to stop looking like a gangster."<sup>18</sup> The handout was informed by nearly three decades of law enforcement experience and expertise available to both the Metro Gang Unit and the SLCPD Gang Task Force, despite being released in 2017.

The TCG experienced conflicts not only with law enforcement but also with Tongans and other Polynesians who were part of law enforcement. Isi Tausinga, the first Tongan police officer in Salt Lake City, faced criticism from members of his own Tongan community who belonged to his church ward and whose children he had arrested multiple times. These encounters became so overwhelming that Tausinga transferred to a predominantly White ward, where he found relief from the condemnation he received from his own community. According to Kinikini, Tausinga was accused of being "whitewashed" because he did not fully comprehend the racism and economic challenges faced by American-born Tongans in Utah. Special Agent Lorenzo "Snow" Leuluai, however, shared a valuable piece of advice given to him by Tausinga: "Never shit on our people."<sup>19</sup> Tausinga advised him that, despite all the work Agent Snow performed in the field, he would ultimately be held accountable by his community upon his return.

According to Agent Snow, the gang suppression handouts and gang intelligence pertaining to the TCG were based on outdated information from the 1980s and 1990s in California and were misguided. For example, he cited the notion that the "T-Off" stance, where a person's feet form the shape of the letter "T," was a sign of disrespect towards another person, usually a gang member, as preposterous. He stated that this was a common posture among people he grew up with who were not affiliated with gangs, and he would not find it disrespectful if his cousin stood in that manner. As a Metro Gang Unit officer, Agent Snow approached encounters with Tongan youth in Utah without assuming they were gang members or affiliated with gangs, based on his personal experience of being harassed and documented as a gang affiliate in his own city. Due to his understanding of the intricacies of street gangs, Agent Snow was respected by gang members, which contrasted with Tausinga's experience.

## RICO and TCG as Legal Fiction

When defense attorney Deirdre Gorman responded to her client's RICO indictment in 2003, she argued that Salt Lake City did not have organized crime but rather a gang problem.<sup>20</sup> The city, however, saw the TCG as a Tongan problem and, in 2008, the A&E Television Network show, *Gangland*, portrayed the TCG as a national issue.<sup>21</sup> According to Kepa, a former member of the TCG, the program lidated the SLCPD's surveillance of the Tongan community. The show's depiction of the TCG as a group that terrorized the city suggested that the entire Tongan community was worthy of surveillance, not just the gang. During the show, an officer shockingly recounted that some gang members carried *The Book of Mormon* with them while they were out "gang banging," implying that Salt Lake City was the collision point of "thugging and religion."<sup>22</sup> For Tongans, as People of *The Book of Mormon*, the officer's reaction displayed his disapproval for Tongan violations of Mormon religio-racial identity. The show's narrator then suggested that the only thing sacred to TCG members was the "religion of crippin'," which conflicted with statewide religio-racial values.<sup>23</sup> In 2010, the SLCPD gang task force identified young men as TCG associates who juxtaposed their cultural ties and practices with the gang's ideology of angafakafonua.

During the *Gangland* episode, a Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints (LDS) elder expressed concern over the conflicting messages of the TCG's violence and the church's message of peace.<sup>24</sup> In the early 19th century, LDS missionaries successfully convinced Tongans in Tonga to adopt LDS ideology and practices alongside angafakafonua. The TCG's violent behavior, however, threatened to undermine this success in the next century. To prosecute the TCG in 2010, the U.S. Attorney's office and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney from Salt Lake District Attorney's office collaborated with various law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Marshals Service, SLCPD, and more. This was the fourth case in the state that prosecuted gang organizations, including the King Mafia Disciples, Tiny Oriental Posse, Soldiers of the Aryan Culture, and the TCG. Despite the TCG's existence throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it was the legal context, rather than reality, that created the version of the TCG prosecuted by the federal government in 2010.<sup>25</sup>

Although there may have been members of other gangs, who subscribed to the Mormon faith, the majority of TCG members were Mormons. The collaborative efforts between law enforcement agencies were driven by underlying racist beliefs that justified hyper surveillance of the Tongan community. Agent Snow acknowledged the differential treatment of law enforcement investigations between minority communities and non-minority communities, with investigators assuming that minority communities were less knowledgeable about American law. Agent Snow also recounted how his supervisor questioned him on his method of explaining Miranda Rights to suspects he arrested during an assessment that was recorded. In order to prove conspiracy, the U.S.

Attorney's office relied on incidents such as the shooting death of Solomone Tu'ifua on February 24, 2007, which they claimed was the result of a "beef" among TCG members, despite David Kamoto's lawyer revealing that it was an argument that turned violent and resulted in death.<sup>26</sup> Expert witness testimony by Break Marino was used by the U.S. Attorney's office to establish criminal enterprise and conspiracy. Kepa Maumau and others appealed their RICO verdicts, questioning the validity of Marino's testimony. Agent Snow revealed that the basis for conspiracy was individual beer runs committed by the 16 men.<sup>27</sup> The beer was produced outside of Utah, brought into the state, and then stolen by alleged TCG members and sold among themselves for profit.

The bulk of TCG membership consisted of Mormons, despite the fact that members of other gangs may also have been Mormons. The collaborative efforts of law enforcement agencies against TCG were motivated by underlying racist ideologies that reinforced hyper surveillance of the Tongan community. Although Agent Snow recognized that investigators used different tactics when investigating minority communities, assuming that they were not proficient in American law, he missed the religious element of punishing Tongans for their disavowal of Mormon religio-racial values. The U.S. Attorney's office stacked maximum charges and penalties against the alleged TCG members, resulting in sentences of over 50 years. Some of the accused Tongan men accepted plea agreements, knowing that the alternative was potentially never seeing the light of day outside of prison walls. Kepa , who was already serving time in a state prison, was charged with RICO based on his guilty plea to Utah and Arizona state charges, resulting in a 57-year prison sentence to be served consecutively. Despite the FBI's and U.S. Attorney's efforts to prosecute TCG, some of the accused Tongan men rejected the false narrative in which the alleged facts of the case were manipulated to fit the crime. Agent Snow believed that his practice of articulating details in his reports, when he encountered Tongan youth suspected of gang affiliation, worked against the harm other law enforcement agencies produced in similar scenarios. Agent Snow, however, argued that law enforcement's predisposition to racially profile Tongan youth as gang members propelled these young men into gangs, rather than deterring them from gang activity.

On October 7, 2011, a federal court jury found six members of the TCG gang guilty, while David Walsh and Charles Moa were acquitted, with the former returning to California where he was already serving a prison sentence.<sup>28</sup> The convicted individuals included Eric Kamahale, Mataika Tuai, David Kamoto, Daniel Maumau, Kepa Maumau, and Sitamipa Toki, all from Salt Lake City. Several of these individuals were already incarcerated in state prisons when indicted by the U.S. Attorney's office on charges under the RICO Act. The charges against the gang members included conspiring to conduct the affairs of the gang through a pattern of racketeering conspiracy, which involved several robberies and attempted robberies. The successful collaboration between state and federal law enforcement agencies, many of which were Mormon,



was highly praised by law enforcement officers, district attorneys, and federal agents in Utah. The severity of the charges against the defendants likely acted as a deterrent to other Tongan individuals from engaging in similar criminal activity in Utah.

On April 21, 2014, Siale Angilau spoke to Judge Tena Campbell about his housing issues during his trial just before the jury arrived in the courtroom. Instead of returning him to Draper, where he was serving a state-mandated prison sentence, marshals relocated him to the Super Max block of Weber County Jail, where he was denied showers. This miscommunication likely further upset Angilau because the legal documents related to his trial were left in his cell at Draper. According to court transcripts, Angilau was respectful during the conversation with the judge, his lawyer, and the marshal regarding the miscommunication. The discussion ended with Judge Campbell coordinating the transportation of Angilau's legal documents to his lawyer, and Angilau replied with gratitude, saying, "Okay, thank you." These were Angilau's last documented words in the court transcript.

During Angilau's federal trial, Vaiola Tenifa was summoned to testify by William Kendall, the U.S. Assistant Attorney, to provide insight into the TCG's structure. Tenifa described his involvement and membership in the TCG, outlining the gang's activities during the late 1990s and early 2000s when he became affiliated with them.<sup>29</sup> While he joined the TCG during his early teenage years, his exposure to the gang began at the age of nine. Tenifa grew up in an LDS household and attended the Tongan speaking Liberty Ward near street addresses 1900 South and 300 East. Some sources claim, however, that he resided in a different part of town during his teenage years when his involvement with the gang reached its peak. In September 2013, Tenifa faced charges of sexually assaulting another inmate at the Cache County Jail, which negatively affected the perception of Tongans, particularly those in the prison system.

Rumors and murmurs regarding Tenifa's inappropriate relationship with Angilau's niece likely fueled Angilau's animosity towards him. Additionally, Tenifa's role as an informant for the prosecution, referred to as a "snitch," may have contributed to Angilau's anger in the courtroom that morning. Tenifa considered himself an OG by the time Angilau and Kepa Maumau began engaging in minor criminal activities. Speculation circulated within the community about the murder of Sione Fakatoufifita near a Maverick convenience store in Glendale. Vilisoni Tuiono Angilau, the younger brother of Siale Angilau, was accused of Fakatoufifita's murder. Vilisoni pleaded guilty to one count of manslaughter and one count of firearm possession, receiving a sentence of 3–15 years for the first count and 1–15 years for the second. At his sentencing, Vilisoni expressed remorse, apologized to the Fakatoufifita family, and bid farewell to his own family.<sup>30</sup> According to Shaheed M. Morris of *The Salt Lake Tribune*, while Vilisoni discharged the firearm, he did so under the direction of another unidentified gang member. Rumors in the Tongan community pointed to Tenifa as that unnamed

accomplice. Tenifa, however, was never implicated as an accessory to Vilisoni's crime, although he had been in and out of prison for various charges, including parole violations. Tenifa was in custody when he testified for the prosecution during Angilau's trial.

While on the witness stand at Angilau's trial, Tenifa was answering the prosecution's questions about the TCG's induction process when Siale abruptly approached the witness stand.<sup>31</sup> Agent Snow insinuated that Tenifa was responsible for inducting Siale and his brother, Vilisoni, into the TCG. Agent Snow also suggested that Siale was likely agitated, knowing that Tenifa's testimony had contributed to guilty verdicts in other RICO cases involving the TCG. For Siale and certain individuals in the Tongan American community, Tenifa was seen as a traitor. The exact motive that drove Siale to rise from his chair in the courtroom remains unknown. Siale was fatally shot in the courtroom during his trial. Following Siale's murder in 2014, his family filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Government and the marshal who fired the fatal shots, seeking to seal the video recording of the courtroom incident. The lawsuit, *Angilau v United States*, claimed that Siale's death resulted from a "reckless and unnecessary use of deadly force," which violated his civil rights.<sup>32</sup> The lawsuit was dismissed, and the video recording was eventually made public through various media outlets.

## Conclusion

The portrayal of the TCG by law enforcement agencies in Utah was legal fiction, which amplified fears and prejudices against Tongans as a cursed people. Tongan Mormons, who identified strongly with *The Book of Mormon*, found themselves subjected to scapegoating by both the theocratic state of Utah and the SLCPD, aiming to shift the blame for the negative perceptions surrounding First Settling Groups from the Americas (FSGTA) communities. Tongans believed that they inherited the sins of their ancestors, as evidenced by their skin color. Through the concept of angafakafonua, FSGTA communities sought to reconnect with their original ideals as People of *The Book of Mormon*. Part of this reconnection involved gathering with their kāinga in a fraternal network. As FSGTA communities gathered, however, they shared their experiences of social inequality and socioeconomic struggles. When FSGTA communities migrated from California to Utah, they brought with them a version of the TCG that had already been influenced by angafakafonua. In Utah, FSGTA communities continued shaping the TCG until the context of the fraternal organization was no longer necessary. By that time, however, the damage to Utah's Mormon religio-racial identity had already been done, perpetuating the notion of punishment from father to son. In 2010, FSGTA communities faced the consequences of their older brothers and cousins.

Defense attorney Scott C. Williams, one of eight attorneys representing the alleged TCG members indicted under RICO charges, argued that the federal charges were inappropriate. Williams claimed that the U.S. Attorney lacked sufficient evidence to prove that the TCG was an organized criminal enterprise. Instead, he argued that many individuals joined the TCG to seek a sense of belonging, influenced by their relatives and neighbours, rather than with the intention of building a professional criminal organization. Williams emphasized the "T" rather than the "C," suggesting that the grouping of Tongan men as a gang was artificial.<sup>33</sup> According to Rogers, this statement further implied that the charges brought by state and federal authorities against the 16 men were erroneous. The collaborative effort among various agencies to secure indictments and guilty verdicts aimed to serve as a deterrent to others who might threaten the safety and well-being of Utah's citizens.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout this article, the definition of what it meant to be Tongan in Utah was shaped by both Tongans and non-Tongans. Sensational media headlines depicted Tongans as predisposed to gang life and violence, raising concerns among non-Tongan residents about the perceived dangers within their city. Tongans like Hala experienced exclusion due to his non-Mormon background. Hala's assertion that being Tongan American meant being part of the TCG indicated his personal realization, aligning himself and others like him as the "Tongan problem" in Utah. Echoing Sullivan's statement about the TCG being more "T" than "C," Lea Lani argued that Utah law enforcement disproportionately targeted Tongans compared to other racial groups, as evidenced by the state and federal agencies' RICO indictment against the fictional TCG. Kepa Maumau contended that the legal fiction of the TCG provided state law enforcement agencies with a target to punish, serving as a deterrent to other communities of color from challenging the state's religio-racial whiteness. Although U.S. Attorney David Barlow claimed that the conviction of Kepa Maumau and five other TCG members was a response to an escalating pattern of violence, Maumau demonstrated in his motion that his crimes were dangerous, not violent.<sup>35</sup>

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act is a United States federal law that gives extended criminal penalties and a civil cause of action for any actions connected to ongoing criminal organization (see also <https://www.justia.com/criminal/docs/rico/>).

<sup>2</sup> Tecun et al., “Talanoa: Tongan epistemology and Indigenous research method,” in *AlterNative* Vol. 14(2), 2018, 156-163.

<sup>3</sup> In the late 1980s, the Tongan Crip Gang (TCG) emerged in areas such as Compton, Lennox, and Inglewood where Tongans had settled in the 1970s and 1980s. Initially, the TCG adopted the street gang ideology of their contemporaries but infused it with core tenets of angafakafonua, a Tongan epistemology, and self-defense. However, faka’apa’apa (respect), which was an important part of angafakafonua, had to be adapted to fit the urban American lifestyle and did not require reciprocity like it did in its traditional form. Additionally, TCG members used māmahī’i me’a to differentiate themselves from other racial groups, particularly Sāmoans, who were often mistaken for Tongans in southern California. While Tongan and Sāmoan gangs initially formed to protect their communities from street gangs, they later became allies in prisons where gang affiliations were less relevant than racial and ethnic identification. As a result, the demographic of “Other,” which included Tongans, Samoans, and Asians, spilled over into gang life on the streets.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Gangland, see <https://www.wvc-ut.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6752/Gang-Handouts>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kepa Maumau, interview by Esiteli Hafoka, June 7, 2021. (Maumau 2021). See “Jury Convicts Six Tongan Crip Gang Members of Violent Crimes; Three Convicted of RICO Conspiracy” <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/saltlakecity/press-releases/2011/jury-convicts-six-tongan-crip-gang-members-of-violent-crimes-three-convicted-of-rico-conspiracy> (MANA n.d.) (cited in Hingano 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Duran, *Gang Life in Two Cities: An Insider’s Journey*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hala Malohi, Interviewed by ‘Esiteli Hafoka, March 19, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Maumau, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Duran, *Gang Life*, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Sullivan, "The Gangs of Zion," *High Country News* August 8, 2005 [https://www.hcn.org/303/15680/print\\_view](https://www.hcn.org/303/15680/print_view).

<sup>15</sup> Su'ad Abdul Khabeer cites self-determination, self-knowledge and political consciousness as ideals hip hop artists explore in their music in *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> "Flags" or bandanas are worn by Crips to signify their affiliation with a gang. TCG often donned navy-blue bandanas hanging out their back pockets, hung over their shoulder, or tied around their head. See <https://www.wvc-ut.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6752/Gang-Handouts>

<sup>17</sup> Salt Lake Area-Gang Project: A Multi-Jurisdictional Gang Intelligence, Suppression, & Division Unit 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Agent "Snow" interviewed by 'Esiteli Hafoka.

<sup>20</sup> Lisa Riley Roche and Laura Hancock, "Gang King Convicted of Federal Charges," *Deseret News*, 16 May 2003. <https://www.deseret.com/2003/5/15/19722532/gang-king-convicted-of-federal-charges>

<sup>21</sup> A&E. 2008. "From Heaven to Hell." Season 3, Episode 5. October 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Maumau, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Agent "Snow"

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

28 “Jury Convicts Six Tongan Crip Gang Members of Violent Crimes; Three Convicted of RICO Conspiracy” <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/saltlakecity/press-releases/2011/jury-convicts-six-tongan-crip-gang-members-ofviolent-crimes-three-convicted-of-rico-conspiracy>

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30 Shaheed M. Morris, “Utah man sentenced to prison for fatal gang-related shooting” in The Salt Lake Tribune, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=253922&itype=CMSID>

31 United States v Siale Angilau Court Transcript.

32 Maveni Angilau, Otufangavalu Angilau, and the Estate of Siale Angilau v The United States of America Case No. 2:16-00992-JED in the United States District Court of the District of Utah November 29, 2017.

33 Melinda Rogers, “Is the Tongan Crip Gang a criminal enterprise?” The Salt Lake Tribune, September 7, 2011. <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=52536619&itype=cmsid>

34 U.S. Attorney’s Office District of Utah 2011.

35 Kevin Johnson, “Crips in Utah: Gang culture invades an unlikely turf” in USA Today <https://www.usatoday.com/story/new/nation/2014/05/26/tonga-crips-gang-utah/9463661/>