

# **Storying the past, navigating the present, imagining the future: Being and becoming young social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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# Abstract

Young people are not often recognised for the contributions that they make to society and young activists are often represented as trouble makers. As a teacher I have worked with many amazing young people who felt compelled to challenge the injustices of the world they are inheriting. These young people are our future. We need to know and understand how they made their journey, who has supported them, and in what ways we can enable more young people to do the same. There is urgency to this work as dominant neoliberal policies and practices have resulted in unprecedented inequality and climate change around the world. In this thesis, I address these issues through examining the lived experiences of young people who take social action for social justice in the communities of Aotearoa New Zealand.

My constructivist grounded theory approach draws attention to contextual perspectives on youth agency and the ways in which young activists are simultaneously constructing identities and performing agency. It is the first study in Aotearoa New Zealand to do so through examining young activists self-understandings. Data were iteratively gathered and analysed from thirteen participants through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion with eight of the participants. The study found that the young activists made their way through their lives addressing the issues that are most problematic to them, carrying what I am calling their *kete* (basket) of knowledge and experiences that enabled them to navigate towards social justice horizons. This *kete* included stories of the past, navigating the present and having a vision for the future. The study found that the formal education system did not play a major role in nurturing the young social activists' identities and agency; rather, the young people created opportunities for themselves and others to be involved in educative projects which were dynamic and responsive to the contexts in which they arose.

The conceptual and theoretical framework underpinning this research is developed through several Freirean concepts, including conscientisation, praxis and critical hope. It argues that the young people's educative projects facilitate the dual processes of constructing identities

in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship. These educative projects are largely youth-led and take place both within and outside of formal education spaces. At their core, the educative projects embody critical reflection and action in order to transform particular aspects of the young people's communities and society as a whole. This thesis argues that these educative projects embody the process of critical consciousness and provide vital sources of critical hope for young people whose lived experiences in the twenty-first century contain many reasons for despair. It presents an alternative and authentically youth-led approach to civic engagement education which nurtures and celebrates youth agency instead of vilifying and constraining it. Through educative projects, young people empower themselves and seek to empower others. By paying attention to youth-led educative projects, educators, youth workers and policy makers can learn to be allies in democratisation rather than upholders of structural injustices which further marginalise the young people they purport to engage and educate. This thesis concludes with an urgent call for the radically democratic practices of youth activists to be embraced by all who work in youth spaces.

# Dedication

The thesis is dedicated to the young activists of Aotearoa New Zealand and the world.  
And to those yet to begin their being and becoming.

We need you.  
And we need to support you.

Kia kaha.

# Acknowledgements

I could not have wished for more generous, thoughtful and inspiring participants for this study. The thirteen young people who agreed to take part in this research did so with such honesty and openness. I thank each and every one of them for their contributions to this thesis and to their communities across Aotearoa New Zealand and the world. Your social justice horizons have inspired me and kept me going through some tough times in this journey.

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As the storying of my participants in this thesis has shown, the storying of my lived experiences and my tūrangawaewae is what has sustained me as I have navigated this doctorate. I acknowledge the values instilled in me by my parents, Margaret and Mike, and their parents before them. I acknowledge my place as the middle child between two amazing and tenacious sisters, Leonora and Raewyn. You are raising caring and empathetic children whom I adore with all of my heart!

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b><i>i</i></b>
<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b><i>iii</i></b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b><i>iv</i></b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b><i>v</i></b>
<b>List of tables</b> .....	<b><i>viii</i></b>
<b>List of figures</b> .....	<b><i>viii</i></b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b><i>ix</i></b>
<b>Reading guide</b> .....	<b><i>xi</i></b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b>Maria</b> .....	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Surveying the landscape &amp; setting the scene</b> .....	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b>What kind of citizens? Narratives and counternarratives of young citizens</b> .....	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b>Critical question and the aims of the study</b> .....	<b><i>7</i></b>
Key assumption: Positive development approaches to research with young people .....	<b><i>8</i></b>
Social justice commitments of the study .....	<b><i>9</i></b>
Defining youth and young people .....	<b><i>11</i></b>
<b>Contextualising the study</b> .....	<b><i>12</i></b>
Neoliberal New Zealand .....	<b><i>14</i></b>
Aotearoa: a post-colonial nation? .....	<b><i>15</i></b>
Multicultural New Zealand in an era of globalisation .....	<b><i>16</i></b>
<b>Rationale and significance</b> .....	<b><i>17</i></b>
<b>Outline of chapters</b> .....	<b><i>18</i></b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b><i>20</i></b>
<b>Chapter 2 – Youth activism: Reading the world through the word</b> .....	<b><i>21</i></b>
<b>Identifying tensions within notions of youth activism and youth civic engagement</b> .....	<b><i>21</i></b>
<b>Youth activism: civic engagement at the maximal end of a continuum</b> .....	<b><i>24</i></b>
<b>Activist settings: the spaces and places of youth activism</b> .....	<b><i>25</i></b>
<b>The discourse of democratic citizen</b> .....	<b><i>28</i></b>
<b>Negotiating activist identities</b> .....	<b><i>30</i></b>
Discussions on the role of social capital .....	<b><i>32</i></b>
<b>Performing activism – what counts as activism?</b> .....	<b><i>34</i></b>
Online and everyday activism .....	<b><i>35</i></b>
<b>Gaps identified and the case for a study examining self-understandings of young activists</b> .....	<b><i>41</i></b>
<b>Summary: Key tensions and messages</b> .....	<b><i>42</i></b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Research design: theoretical and methodological frameworks</b> .....	<b><i>44</i></b>
<b>Part I – Epistemological and theoretical frameworks</b> .....	<b><i>45</i></b>
A Freirean framework.....	<b><i>47</i></b>

Freire’s worldview .....	48
<b>Part II - Methodological framework .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Grounded theory – a constructivist approach .....	54
Data analysis: Constant comparative method .....	56
<b>Part III – Research considerations and an ethics in practice .....</b>	<b>67</b>
Recruiting participants .....	67
Data Collection .....	69
Conducting the interviews.....	69
Reflexivity .....	71
Ethical considerations.....	73
<b>Chapter Summary .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b><i>Chapter 4 – Introducing the participants .....</i></b>	<b><i>77</i></b>
Henare .....	79
Connor .....	81
Tabby .....	82
Mike.....	84
Adam.....	86
Molly.....	88
Nishhza.....	90
Anya.....	92
Tim.....	93
Rose .....	95
Charlizza .....	97
Josh.....	99
Joshua .....	101
<b><i>Chapter 5 – Navigating towards social justice horizons, weaving kete of sustenance .....</i></b>	<b><i>103</i></b>
Young person as navigator .....	104
Kete as sustenance.....	105
<b>Part I – Storying the past .....</b>	<b>106</b>
Stories of solidarity and collective memory .....	108
Stories of lived experiences.....	112
Tūrangawaewae – having a place to stand .....	117
Tūrangawaewae – needing a place to belong.....	121
Summary of storying the past .....	122
<b>Part II – Navigating the present .....</b>	<b>123</b>
Taking and creating opportunities .....	124
Taking risks .....	127
Empowering others – the role of empathy and education .....	129
Challenging liminal positionings .....	133
Negotiating demands on time .....	137
Summary of navigating the present .....	139
<b>Part III – Imagining the future.....</b>	<b>140</b>
Discussing the metaphor .....	141

Equity stemming from empathy.....	144
Empowerment as a process and a goal.....	146
A sustainable future – interconnected and relational .....	148
The importance of having a vision .....	149
Summary of imagining the future .....	150
<b>Being and becoming: storying the past, navigating the present, imagining the future .....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b><i>Chapter 6 – Educative Projects: Constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship .....</i></b>	<b><i>153</i></b>
<b>Introducing the concept of educative projects .....</b>	<b>154</b>
Conscientisation – providing the strength of the <i>kete</i> .....	156
<b>Praxis: Navigating limit situations and dialogical education: challenging dominant narratives of activism .....</b>	<b>159</b>
Discourse as limit situation.....	160
Acting with(in) the formal education system .....	166
Embracing the uncertainty of praxis: the “fear of freedom” .....	167
Taking risks: Challenging limit situations through communication and media .....	169
<b>Critical hope: Radical democracy and the language of possibility.....</b>	<b>175</b>
Tūrangawaewae: a source of critical hope.....	176
Empowering others provides “opportunities for hope” .....	178
Radical democracy: socially just society.....	180
Everyday performances – moments of resistance.....	182
<b>Being and becoming a young social activist.....</b>	<b>184</b>
<b><i>Chapter 7 – Approaching social justice horizons as radically transformative citizens in Aotearoa New Zealand .....</i></b>	<b><i>187</i></b>
<b>The transformative power of educative projects .....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>The importance of storying .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Implications and recommendations.....</b>	<b>190</b>
Creating new discourses of youth and activism.....	190
(Re)defining conceptualisations of democracy .....	191
Learning from youth organising and activism approaches in formal education .....	191
<b><i>Postscript .....</i></b>	<b><i>194</i></b>
<b><i>Appendices.....</i></b>	<b><i>196</i></b>
<b>Appendix A: Call for participants .....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Appendix C: Consent Form A (Interview) .....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Appendix D: Consent Form B (Focus Group).....</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Appendix E: Sample Guiding Questions (Interview).....</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>Appendix F: Focus Group Meeting Activities Plan.....</b>	<b>205</b>
<b><i>References.....</i></b>	<b><i>207</i></b>



## List of tables

Table 1: Summary of key research themes in youth organising and activism literature .....	26
Table 2: Activism as a binary of actions .....	34
Table 3: Dimensions of youth digital activism .....	38
Table 4: Freire’s conceptualisations of problem-posing and banking methods of education	51
Table 5: The components of participants’ horizons and goals when imagining the future .	144

## List of figures

Figure 1: Youth engagement continuum .....	24
Figure 2: Mind-map memo after initial coding with Rose .....	58
Figure 3: Screenshot showing NVivo codes and emerging categories .....	61
Figure 4: Focus group data gathering, activity one .....	64
Figure 5: Focus group data gathering, activity two .....	65
Figure 6: The concepts and properties of navigating towards social justice horizons .....	67
Figure 7: A visual summary of the properties and processes of being and becoming an activist .....	106
Figure 8: A visual summary of the properties and processes of being and becoming an activist .....	152
Figure 9: Being and becoming young social activists through educative projects .....	154
Figure 10: Being and becoming young social activists through educative projects .....	175

# Glossary

This section defines the key terminology used in this study.

## **Aotearoa**

Aotearoa is the Māori (indigenous) name for New Zealand. Aotearoa literally translates to 'land of the long white cloud'.

## **Conscientização**

The original Portuguese for Paulo Freire's concept of conscientisation. I use the term conscientisation most predominantly, apart from when the original text uses the Portuguese term. The phrase critical consciousness is also used interchangeably with conscientisation in the literature.

## **Hapū**

Māori-language term for a kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe - section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society.

## **Hongi**

A Māori greeting where noses are pressed and the two people share the same breath.

## **Kaupapa**

Māori-language term for a topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative.

## **Kaupapa Māori**

A philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society.

## **Kete**

Māori-language term for basket, traditionally woven from flax. Many forms of *kete* are woven with varying styles and lengths of handles, including straps that fit like a back-pack. It is also used as a metaphor.

## **Mana whenua**

Māori-language term for territorial rights, power from the land, authority over land or territory, jurisdiction over land or territory - power associated with possession and occupation of tribal land. The tribe's history and legends are based in the lands they have occupied over generations and the land provides the sustenance for the people and to provide hospitality for guests.

## **Māori**

Māori refers to the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

## **National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)**

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the main qualification for secondary students in New Zealand. Students are assessed against a range of standards

which measure their understanding of particular skills or knowledge using both internal and external assessment. When students achieve in a standard, they gain a number of credits. Students must achieve a specific number of credits to gain an NCEA certificate.

**Pasifika**

A term used to describe people who have migrated from Pacific Island nations to live in New Zealand. It includes their descendants. The term is used somewhat interchangeably by the participants of this study with the term Pacific people/s, referring to those living in the islands as well as in New Zealand.

**Pākehā**

Pākehā is a Māori-language term for non-Māori New Zealanders, primarily of European descent.

**Tangata whenua**

Māori-language term for the people of the land. Local people, indigenous people.

**Te reo / te reo Māori**

Literally translates to “the language” in the Māori language.

**Te ao Māori**

The Māori world, Māori society.

**Tikanga**

Māori-language term for traditional or customary practices and behaviours that are used to govern Māori society.

**Tūrangawaewae**

Māori-language term for a place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and *whakapapa*. Places where one feels especially empowered and connected.

**Whakapapa**

Māori-language term for genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting *whakapapa* was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.

**Whānau**

Māori-language term for family and extended family group.

Definitions of Māori-language words and phrases draw upon <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/>

# Reading guide

This research is concerned with the past, present and future and I have aimed to capture the participant voice using the present tense predominantly to show the present- and future-based sentiments that the young people expressed to me at the time of data gathering. Many section headings use gerunds, indicating the active nature of the navigation as a process that is constant and dynamic, as well as providing a grounded theory approach as outlined in Chapter 3.

Throughout the thesis, the terms 'young social activists' and 'young activists' are used to refer to all of the participants despite several of them stating that they would not use this term to label themselves and their social actions. The reasons for the participants' reluctance to self-identify as activists and the reasons that it is important that I have called them activists forms a large part of the discussion in Chapter 6.

Most of the participants are identified by their own name, having chosen to be known and wanting to be recognised for their contributions to this study. Chapter 3 outlines the ethics in practice of this decision.

Participants comments are indented and formatted in *italics* to make them identifiable from my writing and that of other authors.

Māori words and concepts (and those in other languages) are defined at their initial use and thereafter used without further explanation. These are also available in the front end content in the glossary section.

Around half of the participants identify as people of minority sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics. Connor made the following clarification about the use of preferred language/terms for members of this community, based on research he had undertaken:

Overall, 'rainbow' and 'LGBTQIA+' were more positively looked at when describing the 'community' or the minorities we're talking about. 'Queer' was just under these two in preferred terms.

To be specific in academic writing, the most accurate way to talk about the community is using people of 'minority sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics'. This language use was however seen by my participants as a 'cold' and 'clinical' way to describe people, and they preferred that it was used only when and where needed.

It is important to be specific about individuals when describing their identity.

Throughout the thesis, I use the terms that are preferred by each participant who identifies as part of the rainbow community.

# Preface

## Maria

I love working with young people.  
I am constantly amazed and impressed;  
they offer the world their passion –  
make academic, sporting,  
cultural and community contributions.  
Striving for understanding,  
acceptance and belonging.

Media headlines: *youth*  
fear-inducing stereotypes  
lazy, apathetic, self-obsessed  
dangerous

jar with my experiences of  
young people  
grappling with complex interconnected global issues –  
poverty, climate change, human rights and social justice;  
injustices experienced in so many communities.  
Expressing concern.  
Taking action.  
Bringing about change.

A decade of international schools  
teaching the International Baccalaureate programme  
focusing on student agency,  
authenticity of learning contexts  
and service learning.

Undoubtedly privileged, young people  
Third Culture Kids  
global citizens  
never knowing life as a 'national'  
of any one state.

A quiet question formed  
Held tightly in my heart and mind

*How are these young people becoming?*

And more questions followed

*Is it these schools, their nurturing of community  
and service?*

*Is it these families, their travels  
and experiences of privilege?*

*Is it these experiences –*

*all of them combined?*

Relocating my life  
back home to Aotearoa New Zealand  
resurfaced these questions,  
and added another:

*Rangatahi of Aotearoa, how are you becoming?*

*What systems, structures, relationships have*

*shaped your decisions*

*your passion for social justice action?*

This study is my response to the questions in this poem. It is a record of the journey I have taken as I seek to understand more deeply the lived experiences of young people who are working towards social justice in their communities.

# Chapter 1 – Surveying the landscape & setting the scene

Since our leaders are behaving like children, we will have to take the responsibility they should have taken long ago. (Greta Thunberg, 2018)

At the heart of this thesis is an unwavering belief that young people are not only capable of bringing about transformative change, but the knowledge that they are already doing so. This knowledge is deeply rooted in my experiences as an educator, mentor and ally. As an educational researcher, I set out to develop a deeper understanding of young people's motivations and inspirations for getting involved in social action for social justice. I set out to understand how educators and others who are working with young people can better support them in this vital work. The issue of democracy and citizenship in education is pivotal in that how young people are engaged in these areas during their formative education years will impact on their commitment to, and engagement in, society afterwards (Carr & Thésée, 2010). Given that all three of these concepts – citizenship, democracy and education – are highly contested and open to (re)definition, it is imperative to interrogate the dominant, taken-for-granted understandings of these concepts in the context of twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand. It is also the stance of this thesis to challenge these dominant understandings. Much of this will be established in Chapter 2 where I review the literature regarding youth civic engagement and youth activism in more depth. This chapter provides a brief orientation to the landscape. In this introductory chapter, I establish the reasons for this study, outline the research questions and aims, and provide a glimpse into the temporal, social, cultural and political contexts in which the study takes place.

## **What kind of citizens? Narratives and counternarratives of young citizens**

Critical educational theorist Michael Apple argues that “we live in a time when the very meaning of democracy is being radically changed” (2011, p.21). He describes these changes “from more ‘thick’ collective forms to ‘thin’ consumer driven and overly individualistic forms” (p.22). It follows that the meaning of citizenship and what kind of citizens are desirable in a society is determined by the dominant understanding of democracy in that society. Education is a part of society and plays a crucial role in both reproducing and

challenging dominant understandings (Apple, 2011; Giroux, 2004). The kind of education – and more specifically, the kind of citizenship education – in a society, is therefore, important in democratic societies. New Zealand does not have a dedicated learning area or curriculum subject called *citizenship education* but citizenship education has long held a central role in the curriculum (Mutch, 2013c; Wood & Milligan, 2016). The social sciences learning area is currently where students most explicitly engage with “how societies work and how they themselves, can participate and take action as critical, informed, and responsible citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.17). Who decides what it means to participate and in what ways young people are able to participate is at the heart of critical citizenship educational research. The way in which youth and young people are themselves framed within society also impacts upon these dominant understandings.

The democratic society of Aotearoa New Zealand has a vested interest in young people being active citizens. Both the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) set policy with explicit reference to active citizenship. The *New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2007) contains several citizenship education goals in its vision, principles and values statements, as well as through the key competencies (particularly “participating and contributing” and “relating to others”) and specific achievement objectives within learning areas. For example, the Education for Sustainability, Health and Physical Education, Science and Social Science learning areas’ purpose statements all include commitments to developing knowledgeable, active and critical citizens. The *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002) articulates a vision for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand to be “vibrant and optimistic through being supported and encouraged to take up challenges” (p.7). It sets four goals, the third being youth participation: “creating opportunities for young people to actively participate and engage” (p.8). Through these policies, the government sends the aspirational message that young people are to be valued and involved in their communities and nation.

However, negative views of young people are embedded in the history of New Zealand and its education system: the secular and free primary education for all children that the *1877 Education Act* provided was shaped by public fear of “out-of-control young people” and sought to create a disciplined and moral citizenry (Stephenson, 2009, p.8). Today, the



dominant discourse about youth in the media and the public perception of young people is that they are not involved in politics and not interested in engaging in citizenship activities (Beals & Wood, 2012; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2007; Mutch, 2013a; O’Toole, 2015; Mirra & Garcia, 2017). Indeed, prominent critical theorist Henry Giroux has held the view that there has been a “war on youth” in the United States since the 1980s (Peters, 2012, p.169). Young people are frequently portrayed as a threat to society or vulnerable citizens-in-the-making.

Such negative views render them ineffective and incapable, yet there are many young people who are actively engaged with their communities to bring about changes for a more socially just society in Aotearoa New Zealand. Within senior social studies learning programmes in secondary schools, for example, over 5,000 students a year take *personal social action*<sup>1</sup> (Wood, Taylor, Atkins & Johnson, 2017). In contexts outside of formal education spaces, thousands of young people are also actively engaged in civics and citizenship initiatives. For example, Inspiring Stories creates a range of programmes to support and promote youth leadership and develop ideas to bring about change in the world. Since its inception in 2011, over 9,000 young people have been involved (Inspiring Stories, n.d.). The Student Volunteer Army (SVA) is perhaps the most well-known and largest example of young people collectively working together to make a difference in their communities. Since emerging as an on the ground response in the immediate aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake in September 2010, tens of thousands of young people have volunteered countless hours across the country to help others. The Student Volunteer Army is now a part of New Zealand cultural life, especially with the introduction of the SVA Service Award in 2019 which aims to develop “a volunteering culture in New Zealand’s young people” (SVA, n.d.).

There is a growing body of research showing that young people are interested and engaged citizens, though perhaps in forms that are non-traditional or unconventional (Ginwright, Cammarota & Noguera, 2005; Torney-Purta, Amadeo & Andolina, 2010; Wood, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> *Personal social action* refers to the internally-assessed Social Studies achievement standards which have been available to students at each of the three levels of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in New Zealand since 2013. The NCEA is assessed in the final three years of secondary education. Undertaking this particular achievement standard requires students to actively participate in a social action and reflect upon their personal involvement in that social action.

Moreover, there are claims that young people are not apathetic, but feel alienated from more traditional, institutional forms of civic and political engagement that they see as unresponsive to their concerns (Manning, 2010; O'Toole, 2015). Significantly, there is a growing body of research concerned with the role of digital tools and online spaces in the lives of young activists. Online activism is acknowledged as a significant form of participation by some, while discredited as "slacktivism" or "clicktivism" by others (McKenzie, 2019; Mirra & Garcia, 2017; Schuster, 2013). Chapter 2 expands upon these tensions in the literature.

Despite the emergence of these counternarratives, the crisis narrative that young people are in need of civics and citizenship education, as if it does not already exist and is not already happening in classrooms around the country, continues strongly. In 2015 the McGuinness Institute held CivicsNZ workshops and published a working paper in response to the recommendation of the Constitutional Advisory Panel, in 2013, that a national strategy for civics and citizenship education was needed in schools and communities. The authors conclude that there is a persistent lack of knowledge and interest in democracy (Tavich & Kriebel, 2018). In November 2018, a Civics and Citizenship Summit was held at Parliament to facilitate discussion on this same matter. The New Zealand Political Studies Association (NZPSA) organised the summit and published the report *Our Civic Future* with the aim of informing "public discussion about how to build resilience into our democratic system" (NZPSA, 2018, p.3). The report and summit are framed as a response to an urgent need for debate and discussion in light of declining voter turnout, serious gaps in civic knowledge and participation, and a general awareness of the threats facing other democracies around the world.

While schools and curricula are seen as an important method of engaging young people in the process of becoming the active citizen that democratic societies require (Apple, 2011; Banks, 2004; Mutch, 2013c; Wood, 2014) this study moves beyond formal institutions of education to include other spheres in which young people move, act and interact. I'm interested in the reasons why young New Zealanders take social action in their communities. There is a small (and growing) body of literature on citizenship education in New Zealand, but literature on young social activists in a New Zealand context is limited (see Beals & Wood, 2012; McKenzie, 2019; Mutch, 2013a; Nairn, 2019; Nissen, 2017; Schuster,

2013; Wood & Black, 2014) and we understand very little about who and what influences and motivates these young people. By using a Freirean lens to examine the experiences and understandings of young social activists, this study aims to contribute to a counter discourse which sees young people as citizens performing agency in the present, not only as citizens in the future.

In summary, at the time of undertaking this study, there is a strong concern that democratic understandings and the abilities of young people to actively participate in the civic life of Aotearoa New Zealand are in decline and that there is a distinct lack of consistency in the way that citizenship education and political literacy is being taught in formal education settings. There is an agreement, however, that discussion about citizenship, civics and political literacy and resources to build capabilities of young people – both within and outside of formal education – is an important element of a healthy and thriving democratic society. This study set out to ensure that young social activists' voices are an integral part of these conversations.

### **Critical question and the aims of the study**

I am interested in young people's views of how and why they become involved in taking social action; what their vision of social justice is; and what they are doing to achieve it. The central research question of the project is:

*What are young people's experiences of being and becoming social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand?*

In support of the research question, the aims of the project are to:

- a) hear the voices of young social activists relating to civic engagement, citizenship education and youth development;
- b) explore visions of a socially-just society from a youth perspective; and,
- c) inform and influence policy surrounding citizenship education, youth development programmes and other civic engagement initiatives, thus shaping new opportunities for young people and their communities.

**Key assumption: Positive development approaches to research with young people**

It is significant that in the past two decades there has been a conceptual shift by researchers and practitioners (and then policy makers) from youth as problems to youth as social assets. With this positive youth development (PYD) approach, young people are framed as agents who bring vitality and fresh perspectives to their communities (Flanagan & Syvertsen, 2006), and their self-worth and self-awareness are acknowledged (Ginwright et al., 2005). The model promotes the development of the young person through focusing on six key characteristics: competence, confidence, character, connection, caring and contribution (Shaw, Brady, McGrath, Brannan & Dolan, 2014). The final characteristic – contribution – is framed as both emerging from the first five, and allowing for the continued development of those characteristics. Furthermore, the literature argues that “PYD can promote civic engagement, which in turn further promotes PYD” (Shaw et al., 2014, p.306). In New Zealand, the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) explicitly aligns policy with a PYD framework. Originally implemented in 2002 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs, *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* set out clear intentions to shift focus away from the prevention models of previous decades. In 2009, the MYD published a review of evidence of structured youth development programmes and summarised the characteristics of effective youth development programmes as:

- the use of a competence - rather than a deficit - based paradigm: young people are viewed as being ‘at potential’ rather than ‘at risk’ or as problems to be fixed
- taking a holistic view of young people
- taking an ecological view: recognising the influence of the different environments or settings that young people exist in
- taking a dual focus of enhancing young people’s protective factors and building their capacity to resist risk factors: i.e., take a dual promotion and prevention focus. (MYD, 2009, p. 8)

Despite this positive shift in research and policy, however, Ginwright et al. (2005) identify limitations in the way that youth development research conceptualises the role of young people in their communities: individual behaviour is emphasised rather than collective responses to marginalisation; young people are seen as objects of policy rather than as actors who possess the rights and abilities to shape policy; and communities are often characterized as static, apolitical and the impact of larger economic and social factors on

youth are generally overlooked. In response, Ginwright et al. (2005) outline three assumptions about youth, social justice and communities:

1. Youth have the right to participate in the creation of policies that affect them
2. Youth are agents who have the potential to act and play a role in transforming conditions in neighbourhoods and communities in which they live
3. Youth, as collective community actors, are key agents in community change.

(p.32)

I share Ginwright et al.'s (2005) assumptions and endeavoured to use these as touchstones throughout this study. I do so most noticeably in the choices I have made about the research design allowing for participant input and the very fact that I am interested in understanding how young people view the social action they take. As I worked with my participants, I made it clear that I hold the above assumptions and believe that this contributed to building the rapport that allowed the participants to be trusting and forthcoming with me about their experiences, beliefs and actions. I also believe that in sharing these assumptions with my participants I was able to ease potential concerns about the power dynamic between myself as researcher and the young people as participants. This is significant in light of the dominant discourses of young people as future-citizens with little of value to contribute to their communities in the present. This study explicitly aims to counter the silencing of youth voices and as such the reflexivity of my research approaches must also be explicit. These are discussed at length in Chapter 3.

### **Social justice commitments of the study**

As this study is interested specifically in the ways in which young people are taking action for social justice, it is important to state the commitments of this study to a justice discourse of civic engagement. Social justice is used across a wide spectrum of political and philosophical perspectives, reflecting diverse goals and understandings (Craig, Burchardt, & Gordon, 2008). It is a difficult term to define (Denti & Whang, 2012). While the term social justice has been around since the mid nineteenth century, the contemporary meanings centre around two concepts of justice which are co-fundamental and highly contestable: economic re/distribution and cultural recognition (Cho, 2017; North, 2006). The distributive paradigm of justice is dominant (Tatebe, 2017) and closely linked to the work of philosopher

John Rawls who identified social justice as “a more “fair” and equitable distribution of social and economic resources, and democratic rights and participation” (Tatebe, 2017, p.108). The dominance of the distributive model has been critiqued by both Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser. Young (1990) argues the need for a relational paradigm of justice, to address injustices stemming from oppression and domination between groups and individuals that cannot be understood or remedied through the redistribution of goods and materials. For Young (1990), collective identities, interdependencies, mutual respect, and equal participations are recognised and addressed through a relational justice model. Young’s work centres on the recognition of institutionalised social injustice; she argues that the social processes and relations of oppression and domination must be challenged for social justice to exist. Fraser’s (1995) work “called into question the politics of affirmative recognition, which Young (1990) had emphasized...by arguing that such a politics fails to actualize transformative redistribution” (Cho, 2017, p.4). Fraser (2004) argued for a social justice model based on a “two-dimensional” view of justice whereby redistribution and recognition are “*dimensions of justice that can be found in all social movements*” (para. 13, emphasis in original). Fraser later added a third dimension of “representation” to her framework to include the processes of social belonging, membership, inclusion in political and social life and how one is able to participate in decision-making (Tatebe, 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

Conceptualisations of social justice in civic engagement and citizenship education contexts matter because the way social justice is framed will directly relate to the kind of citizenry that is desired. There is agreement in the social justice education literature that the key components of social justice are fairness and equity, being critical and analytical of society, how it came to be structured, and how that structure works to perpetuate hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality (Ayers et al., 2009; Banks, 2004; Wade, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). It is the aim of this study to explicitly examine young activists’ understandings and conceptualisations of social justice, as it is central to youth activist literature as a desirable outcome of youth civic engagement and citizenship education.

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<sup>2</sup> Cho (2017) offers an in-depth discussion of the subsequent critiques Young and Fraser have entered into over each other’s conceptualisations of social justice.

### **Defining youth and young people**

The category of *young people* or *youth* takes on different boundaries within and between different socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts and traditions (Fisher, 2015; Flanagan & Syvertsen, 2006; White & Wyn, 1998; Wood, 2017). It is most frequently conceptualised as a transitional life stage between childhood and adulthood in which various social and legal rights are granted to individuals. White and Wyn (1998) summarise the central assumption of youth as a “developmental stage on the way to becoming an adult” and argue that this model “provides a framework that legitimates surveillance of young people and intervention in their lives by professionals, in the assumed interests of young people and their families” (p.319). The concept of youth transitions views young people moving through a linear process of development that, with guidance from adults and through making choices about their pathways in life, leads them to the status of economically independent adulthood (White & Wyn, 1998; Wood, 2017). This does not reflect the non-linear, messy, multidimensional reality of young people’s lives and new ways of conceptualising youth are required (White & Wyn, 1998; Wood, 2017; Wyn, 2014). Drawing upon recent research in childhood and youth studies, I have chosen to approach this study with an understanding that young people are in a ceaseless and dynamic process of simultaneously being and becoming (for example see Bartos, 2016; Stetsenko, 2012; and Wood, 2017).

In New Zealand, citizens become legal adults at age 18, yet economically an 18 year old in today’s society is unlikely to be able to assume the responsibilities of adulthood if they are not financially self-sufficient. Nor does society view most 18 year olds as having the social and emotional maturity expected of an adult. As Flanagan and Syvertsen (2006) note, the education systems of Western societies gather young people together away from older generations for learning to take place in processes that are vastly different from the apprenticed traditions of pre-Industrial societies. In the twenty-first century, there is now an emphasis on education or training in formal learning institutions that lasts until people are in their twenties. The reality is that to earn enough money to support a family, some kind of tertiary qualification is necessary. Thus, adulthood is generally delayed and the category of youth stretches well beyond the teenage years that traditionally mark the transition from child to adult. Wyn (2014) discusses the use of the phrase “new adulthood”

to describe the implications for young people aged 19-25 due to these changes in labour market conditions and education. She argues that opportunities for young people have both foreclosed and opened up as a result of socioeconomic changes and technological developments since the 1980s. Other writers argue that an “emerging adulthood” exists until the early thirties when adult independence is achieved; youth, then, does not extend beyond the mid-twenties (Cieslik & Simpson, 2012).

In short, youth is a contested and fluid concept. In a New Zealand context, the Ministry of Youth Development recognises 12 to 24 year olds as young people, while to be considered for the Young New Zealander of the Year Award you must be between 15 and 30 years of age. At the time of the 2018 Census there were 963,687 people aged 15 -29 living in New Zealand. That equates to 20.5% of the population (Statistics NZ, 2019a). For this study, I set the upper age boundary at 30 as this enabled the inclusion of participants who have been involved in sustained action over a number of years. The lower age boundary of 16 enabled participants still in some form of education, whether that was formal schooling, alternative education or through an apprenticeship style of learning, to participate. In addition, at 16, participants are also considered to be legally responsible for their decision to take part in the research process; they do not require consent from a legal guardian. I wanted my participants to be performing agency in choosing to be a part of this study.

## **Contextualising the study**

Any critical theory both defines and is defined by the problems posed by the contexts it attempts to address. (Giroux, 2003, p.5)

As I interviewed my participants, New Zealand was in the eighth year of a centre-right National government (2008-2016) which had followed on from nine years of a centre-left Labour government (1999-2008). The 2017 election was looming; Prime Minister John Key resigned unexpectedly in December 2016 and change seemed possible but not probable. Jacinda Ardern had not yet become the leader of the Labour Party and was certainly not a contender to be the next Prime Minister of New Zealand.



While the twenty-first century has seen a global rise in student protest (Brooks, 2017; and see Nissen, 2017, p.11), the high-profile activism around the world in well-established democracies<sup>3</sup> since this study first began in mid-2015 could not have been foreseen. For example, there have been national movements in response to specific ideologically-driven policies, such as the pro and anti-Brexit protests in the United Kingdom; the anti-austerity “yellow vest” movement in France; the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong; and the protests against inequality in Chile. In the United States, anti-Trump protests began in 2016 and spread around the world in solidarity as the Women’s March movement in January 2017 after Donald Trump was sworn into office as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. The #MeToo movement and #TimesUp emerged as the activist calls of the fourth wave of feminism. #BlackLivesMatter and #MarchForOurLives became prominent campaigns in the call for wide-sweeping cultural change to both systemic racism and gun violence in the United States and have spread around the world. Young people have been front and centre in this activism. For example, the movement March For Our Lives was organised by students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida after a shooter killed 17 people at the school. On March 24, 2018 over a million people took part in protests across the US and around the world. These young activists know the statistics of gun violence, they know the research that says gun control reduces shooting deaths. They want adults and law makers to take responsibility and do something about it.

Another issue that has galvanised and mobilised young people is climate change. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand young people established the group *Generation Zero* in 2012 with the aim of campaigning for a carbon neutral future. Since 2018, children and young people have been organising in the *School Strike 4 Climate* movement and *Fridays For Future*. They are protesting the lack of urgency with which governments and corporations are taking action to limit the devastating effects of climate change that are already visible. Another climate activist group, *4 Tha Kulture*, advocates for climate justice from an indigenous and minority lens, particularly the peoples of the Pacific. The young people involved are calling on adults and law makers to take responsibility and do something about it. Young people

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<sup>3</sup> Numerous protests and demonstrations have also taken place in non-democratic states (such the second Arab Spring protests), but as the context of this study is Aotearoa New Zealand, I include examples only from other states and nations with political, economic and sociocultural similarities to ours. For a discussion of global civic activism, see Youngs (2019).

are also running for political office at both local and national level. Groups such as *Generation Zero*, *The School Strike 4 Climate/Fridays For Future* and *4 Tha Kulture* movements are evidence of democratic youth participation in action: a demand to have not only a voice in the discussion but to be the voice that is listened to and acted upon.

These examples are only a brief snapshot of the backdrop to this study, but it is important to situate this research project within this global landscape of youth activism in Western democratic nations. The activism of 2019, for example, has brought comparisons to 1968, a year which has been heralded as transformative in the history of civil protest and democratic uprising (Wright, 2019). The fact that young people are at the centre of these prominent movements makes this not only a very timely study, but one that is urgently needed. Young activist Greta Thunberg's warning that "our house is on fire" (2019), is a literal devastating reality for hundreds of thousands of Australians as I write this in January 2020.

For the remainder of this section of the chapter, I situate the study in the more specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand and its place within the world. I outline three aspects of importance to that particular society: neoliberal policies; colonisation and the bicultural partnership of Te Tiriti o Waitangi; and multiculturalism within globalisation.

### **Neoliberal New Zealand**

It is important to situate the study in the neoliberal realities of society at this time, both nationally and globally. The young people who are participants in this study have grown up with market-driven values of competition and individualism pervading every aspect of their lives (Giroux, 2004; Kennelly, 2008; 2011). The structural adjustment policies implemented by successive New Zealand governments from 1984 to 1999 wrought "rigid and extensive programmes of economic, social and cultural change" (O'Neill, 2005, p. 139), drastically altering the relationship between the state and the public in its provision of services such as housing, health and education. Essentially, what once were considered to be state provided services for the common good, have become goods to be bought and sold in the free market economy. This commodification "threatens the destruction of non-market spheres of life on which social solidarity and active democracy have always depended" (Leys, 2003,

as cited in Apple, 2011, p.23). Even as New Zealand looks to move towards a post-neoliberal world, Kelsey (2015) argues that the fundamental contradiction to be overcome is that “the state and society are locked into a governance regime and a financialised economy that are dysfunctional but hard to dismantle” (p.12).

One of the implications of thirty years of neoliberal agenda on young people today are the utilitarian goals of schools which have the “primary aim of producing self-regulating, economically autonomous and employable students” (Wood & Black, 2014, p.58). Thus the attributes, skills and knowledge associated with the neoliberal ideology dominate educational and citizenship discourses and practices (Apple, 2011). Nissen (2017) reviews the impacts of neoliberalism on tertiary students in New Zealand since the 1990s: tuition fees and student loans have resulted in rapidly growing student debt (p.20); this, coupled with increasingly high costs of living mean that students are taking on employment during term time and one in six students are living in significant financial distress (p.21). Nissen also highlights student well-being and mental health as being negatively impacted by these changes (p.22). How young activists develop the attributes, skills and knowledge which are essential to bringing about transformative social change in the “contemporary despair” (Bozalek, Leibowitz, Corlissen & Boler, 2014, p.1) of these neoliberal times are examined in this study.

### **Aotearoa: a post-colonial nation?**

Citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand must be understood in terms of its history as a colonised territory of the British Empire. The agreement that is regarded as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, was signed between Crown representatives and many (but not all) Māori chiefs in 1840. The partnership entered into has been the subject and cause of much controversy since then. Two versions of the treaty exist, one in te reo Māori, which the vast majority of Māori chiefs signed; and one in English, which few Māori chiefs signed. Crown representatives and subsequent governments upheld the English version as *the* Treaty of Waitangi. The two versions are not the same and the outcome has been to the extreme disadvantage of Māori who have the highest rates of incarceration, child poverty, unemployment and suicide; and the lowest rates of home ownership in the country. This study is situated in twenty-first

century Aotearoa New Zealand and recognises it as a nation which remains deeply colonised. This thesis is explicitly part of a growing voice calling for and working towards a decolonised Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is true that significant changes in attitudes towards both Māori and education have occurred since the 1970s, but these changes have been hard won by Māori in a system in which colonial knowledge and experience continues to be dominant (Lee-Penehira, 2018). In more recent decades, governments have successively looked to redress historical injustices to Māori through policy and processes designed to honour the partnership agreement of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The 1984 Fourth Labour Government adopted biculturalism to signify this relationship of Māori and Pākehā as partners socially and politically (Lourie, 2016). Lourie (2016) argues that bicultural policy symbolises the ideal of *fairness* and is a powerful discourse in reframing the narrative of the colonised/coloniser relationship. In reality however, biculturalism is complex and contested (see Lourie, 2016 for a detailed discussion).

This study is nestled in this context of calls for decolonising education because it is concerned with the ways in which young social activists understand their activism, the transformative changes they are working towards in the systems and structures of society, and how they are doing so.

### **Multicultural New Zealand in an era of globalisation**

The final context that is important to note for this study is that of Aotearoa New Zealand as a diverse, multicultural society which operates in a global sphere. Democracy, diversity and globalisation underpin our everyday experiences, our values, our actions and our knowledge (Barr, Graham, Hunter, Keown & McGee, 1997). In 1987, New Zealand ended over a century of immigration policy based on a country preference policy and established policy focused on the level of skill and work experience migrants offered (Fry & Glass, 2016). The 2018 Census data shows that 27.4 percent of the population was not born in New Zealand, and that we have a population with growing ethnic diversity (Statistics NZ, 2019b). 16.5 percent of New Zealand residents identified ethnically as Māori, 15.1 percent as Asian and 8.1 percent as Pacific (Statistics NZ, 2019b). A diversifying population brings social and

economic benefits, while also providing challenges for society. There is tension between multicultural and bicultural discourses, with the argument that Pacific peoples, Asian peoples and other non-British New Zealanders are marginalised and excluded from the discussion on national identity (Lourie, 2016). The discourse of global citizenship and global citizenship education has also become prominent in recent decades. What it means to be a global citizen, or even if one exists, is highly contested (see Matapo, 2019; Macfarlane, 2019; Wood, 2019). This has important implications for democracy, education and citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to make sense of the voices and experiences of thirteen young New Zealanders who are civically and politically involved in their communities by taking social action. It gives a small group of committed young New Zealanders the opportunity to voice their vision of a more socially just society and articulate how they think future generations can be empowered to take social action in their communities.

## **Rationale and significance**

In this introductory chapter, I have established that young people can make a significant contribution to their communities, and there are thousands of young New Zealanders around the country working to make a difference in society. Indeed, educating young people to become active citizens is an explicit aim of the *New Zealand Curriculum*. The learning area of the social sciences states “students explore how societies work and how they themselves can participate and take action as critical, informed, and responsible citizens” (MOE, 2007, p.17). The Ministry of Youth Development also supports this aim. It promotes active youth citizenship, which “is about increasing young people’s confidence, leadership and self-management skills to better participate in society” (MYD, 2012, p.4). What it means to be an active citizen is ambiguous but there is general agreement in the literature that there is a spectrum of civic activity from minimal (passive) participation to maximal (active) participation (Wood, Taylor & Atkins, 2013). Drawing on four frameworks developed in the field of citizenship research (McLaughlin, 1992; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Kennedy, 2006; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003), Wood et al. (2013) state that the more active conceptions of citizenship are *transformative* in that they “favour a more fully

participatory approach with citizens expected to question the decision-making of society and work towards the empowerment of all citizens” (p. 86).

In my use of the term *social action* I invoke this conception of transformative social-justice oriented participation in society. When I use *young social activists*, I am referring to people between the ages of 16 and 30 who take such social action. Moreover, this study positions *youth activism* as “a critical form of civic engagement in which youth are encouraged to question the status quo and envision better alternatives for themselves and their peers” (Kirshner, 2007, p.368). The exploration of significant literature in the next chapter will situate youth activism within the field of civic engagement.

In summary, I have introduced the key narratives and counternarratives which are pertinent to this study, set out the research question and aims of the project and discussed the context of the study and the significance of that context. What follows is an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

## **Outline of chapters**

**Chapter 2: Reading the world of youth activism through the word** provides a summary of significant prior research in the intersecting and interrelated areas of youth activism and civic engagement. It outlines the main tensions within the fields of civic engagement and youth activism and the differing ways in which conceptualisations of the “good citizen” have impacted on understandings of young people’s activism. It frames activism as a contested concept and highlights the problematic binary of presenting active citizenship as either traditional or non-traditional actions. An overview of research that moves beyond this binary and embraces the everyday performances of citizenship follows, before a brief discussion of the gaps identified in the literature brings the chapter to a close.

**Chapter 3: Research becomings: theoretical and methodological frameworks** introduces the research design. It provides a rationale for using the work of Paulo Freire as the key theoretical framework within a critical social theory approach. It explains how these epistemic and theoretical commitments fit with the choice of constructivist grounded

theory as a methodology. This chapter ends with a reflection on the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process and how it constitutes an ethics in practice.

**Chapter 4: Introducing the participants** uses the participants' voices to create brief monologues *found* in their interview transcripts. These introductory "found poems" are designed to capture a snap-shot of the participants as more complete and whole individuals than the findings chapter and the subsequent discussion chapter allows for. The purpose of the chapter is for the young people to be seen and heard more fully.

**Chapter 5: Navigating towards social justice horizons, weaving *kete* of sustenance** presents the findings of the grounded theory study through these two metaphors. The chapter argues that the participants are simultaneously being and becoming activists as they navigate towards social justice horizons. As they navigate the present, they are drawing upon stories of the past and imagining the future. The chapter is structured around the three themes of storying the past, navigating the present and imagining the future.

**Chapter 6: Constructing identities in resistance through performing educative projects** discusses the findings through a Freirean lens. I introduce a conceptual model which explains how the grounded theory of young activists navigating towards social justice horizons can be understood through the process of conscientisation. It examines how the participants are activists in their own ways through educative projects focused on empowering others and challenging dominant discourses. The chapter establishes that participants' educative projects embody praxis, are dialogical and informed by critical hope. I argue that these processes are mediated through contextual and situated agency which engenders the construction of identities in resistance and the performance of radically transformative citizenship.

**Chapter 7: Being and becoming radically transformative citizens in Aotearoa New Zealand** concludes the thesis. I explore how the conceptual model to emerge from this thesis can act as a tool for young activists and anyone working in the spaces of youth activism, youth civic engagement and citizenship education who seek to understand the processes and contexts of being and becoming radically transformative citizens. I outline the implications of this

study with recommendations for further study and approaches that the participants would like to see in education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **Summary**

This chapter has established that the civic engagement and education of young people is recognised as an important element of democratic society. However, in the past few decades, a discourse arguing that young people are apathetic and disengaged in civic and political activities has become prominent and resulted in research into youth civic engagement from a deficit perspective. A counter-discourse is now emergent in which youth activism is framed as a significant form of civic engagement but there have been few studies explicitly examining the self-understandings of the processes and contexts of youth activism. This thesis sets out to do so. I have provided a brief overview contextualising Aotearoa New Zealand as a democratic nation where colonial systems and neoliberal policies continue to be dominant. I have established that these values are being challenged by young activists here in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world through highly visible large scale protests calling for transformative change and social justice. The next chapter canvasses the literature on youth activism, and shows that protests are only part of a range of actions available to young social activists.



## Chapter 2 – Youth activism: Reading the world through the word

As already established in Chapter 1, this study embraces a positive development approach to research *on, with* and *for* youth. This chapter outlines key arguments around the current literature on youth activism and youth civic engagement. I begin by presenting tensions within the concepts of youth activism and youth civic engagement. Activism is not universally accepted as a form of civic engagement, nor an acceptable goal of democratic citizenship, especially for young people. I provide an overview of normative characteristics of civic engagement and the discourse of democratic citizenship. The majority of the literature reviewed has a specific focus on research which challenges these normative understandings of youth civic engagement and embraces the everyday performances of young people's civic engagement and activism. This focus on the everyday reveals the variety of ways in which young people are engaging in activism, particularly with digital media in online spheres.

The literature also highlights the simultaneous nature of the development and performance of an activist – a process that is fluid and never complete (Fisher, 2015). It is not so much a linear process as it is a web of experiences, actions and interactions. The chapter concludes with an overview of selected gaps that this study aims to at least partially address. This focus on these gaps further illustrates how I developed my research question.

### **Identifying tensions within notions of youth activism and youth civic engagement**

There are tensions surrounding the concepts of youth activism, youth civic engagement and citizenship education within the literature that provides orientation for this study. Sherrod (2010) states that activism is an “unquestionable form of civic engagement” (p.2) which is essential in a healthy and robust democratic society. The literature reveals that activism is not, however, a form of civic engagement or citizenship participation that is uniformly embraced and encouraged, particularly when pertaining to youth and young people. According to Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan (2010) youth civic engagement is a field that “has come of age” (p.1), meaning that there has been a significant amount of research

produced by scholars from many disciplines and across the world. Sherrod et al. note that since the 1960s there have been “waves of attention” in research on the civic engagement of youth, with the shifting political world of the 1990s creating an upsurge of interest. The current *wave of attention* has been prompted by Putnam’s (2000) declaration that democratic participation was in crisis due to the falling rates of involvement of younger generations in formal political processes (Sherrod et al, 2010), and the erosion of social capital in the U.S. since the 1950s (Hart & Gullan, 2010). Moreover, Wood (2011) argues that “many nations have developed citizenship education initiatives in order to address this perceived youth apathy” (p.6). This narrative of the crisis of youth civic engagement remains dominant (Mirra & Garcia, 2017).

Youth civic engagement essentially covers a wide array of activities which can take place in a range of settings (Shaw et al., 2014). The term civic engagement is multifaceted and complex (Sherrod et al., 2010). It generally relates to active citizenship and/or participation in democratic communities with the goal or intention of improving the wellbeing of society, and exercising rights and responsibilities both on an individual and collective level (Shaw et al., 2014). Tensions arise in the specific conceptions of what is measured as civic engagement by researchers in different fields and traditions. In sociology and political science studies in the U. S., civic engagement is referred to as political socialisation (Sherrod et al., 2010), and research typically compares “the actions and attitudes of today’s youth (as represented through large-scale survey responses) to their counterparts from previous decades” (Mirra & Garcia, 2017, p.140). These surveys (from the U.S.) use normative characteristics of citizenship which have become “commonly accepted as normative attributes of civic engagement” (p.140):

- belonging to at least one group
- attending religious services at least once monthly
- belonging to a union
- reading newspapers at least once per week
- voting
- being contacted by a political party
- working on a political project

- attending club meetings
- believing that people are trust worthy
- volunteering

There is increasing awareness and acknowledgement in the literature that such normative approaches about what counts as youth civic engagement is highly problematic and needs to be interrogated (Shaw et al, 2014; Mirra & Garcia, 2017). Mirra and Garcia (2017), for example, critique studies that show large inequalities between the civic participation of young people along socio-economic, class, race and educational attainment, arguing that “deficits within marginalised communities and/or the inequitable distribution of civic learning opportunities” (p.141) are frequently highlighted as the reason for lower engagement rates. In such research approaches, the problem is located within the communities where the inequalities exist and not with the normative attributes of civic engagement behaviours (Mirra & Garcia, 2017). There is a growing body of research that is challenging these normative characteristics but as Sherrod et al. (2010) explain, “concern for others, participation in community service, and activism for social justice are not universally acknowledged as forms of civic engagement” (p.8).

As established in Chapter 1, the meaning of democracy is radically changing from thicker collective forms to thinner, more individualistic, consumer driven forms (Apple, 2011). This has an impact on what forms of civic engagement are expected from (and acceptable for) young people. Researchers in both youth civic engagement and citizenship education have developed continuums which place youth activism at the *thick or maximal* end of the continuum. However, as Sherrod et al. (2010) point out, not all researchers agree that activism is a form of civic engagement. This tension over where activism sits in the field, and what constitutes activism is an increasingly common topic of research in the context of the twenty-first century (see Chapter 1 for this argument).

## Youth activism: civic engagement at the maximal end of a continuum

When viewing youth civic engagement as part of a continuum of youth engagement and forms of youth activity, youth activism is conceptualised as being a maximal form of democratic participation, with goals of systemic change (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Youth engagement continuum

Intervention	Development	Collective empowerment	Systemic change	
<p>Youth services approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defines young people as clients</li> <li>• Provides services to address individual problems and pathologies of young people</li> <li>• Programming defined around treatment and prevention</li> </ul>	<p>Youth development (YD)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides services and support, access to caring adults and safe spaces</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for the growth and development of young people</li> <li>• Meets young people where they are</li> <li>• Builds young people's individual competencies</li> <li>• Provides age appropriate support</li> <li>• Emphasizes positive self identity</li> <li>• Supports youth-adult partnerships</li> </ul>	<p>Youth leadership (YL)</p> <p>Includes components of YD plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds in authentic youth leadership opportunities within programming and organization</li> <li>• Helps young people deepen historical and cultural understanding of their experiences and community issues</li> <li>• Builds skills and capacities of young people to be decision makers and problem solvers</li> <li>• Youth participate in community projects</li> </ul>	<p>Civic engagement (CE)</p> <p>Includes components of YD &amp; YL plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages young people in political education and awareness</li> <li>• Builds skills and capacity for power analysis and action around issues young people identify</li> <li>• Begins to help young people build collective identity of young people as social change agents</li> <li>• Engages young people in advocacy and negotiation</li> </ul>	<p>Youth organising</p> <p>Includes components of YD, YL &amp; CE plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds a membership base</li> <li>• Involves youth as part of core staff and governing body</li> <li>• Engages in direct action and political mobilizing</li> <li>• Engages in alliances and coalitions</li> </ul>

Source: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organising (2003, p. 10)

Kirshner and Ginwright (2012) define youth organising as “a form of civic engagement in which young people identify common interests, mobilize their peers, and work collectively to address quality of life and human rights issues in their schools and communities” (p. 288). As Figure 1 shows, researchers within the youth organising sector view youth civic engagement as a form of youth engagement activity that includes, and moves beyond, youth development and youth leadership approaches. On the far left of the continuum are the intervention approaches of *youth services*: young people are clients who are provided services of treatment and prevention. On the far right are the systemic change approaches of *youth organising*: young people are members involved in the governance and delivery of programmes involving direct action and political mobilisation in coalitions and alliances with other groups and organisations. *Civic engagement* is categorised as a collective empowerment approach and placed to the left of *youth organising*, as a precursor to this level of engagement. *Youth organising* engages young people in political education and awareness through programmes that build skills and capacity for power analysis and action around issues young people identify. Programmes begin to help young people build collective identity as social change agents and engage young people in advocacy and negotiation.

### **Activist settings: the spaces and places of youth activism**

There are a range of settings in which the development of youth civic engagement can take place. Shaw et al. (2014) identify six settings: local grassroots level; schools; third level institutions such as universities and colleges; non-governmental organisations; government/political institutions; and political parties. This literature review focuses primarily on studies exploring youth activism in informal educational settings such as local youth community groups and non-governmental organisations operating at local, regional, national and international levels.

Activism in community and youth organising settings often focus on marginalised youth, particularly in low-income communities of colour (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). Common characteristics of youth activist groups are featured in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of key research themes in youth organising and activism literature

Benefits and impacts	Making social change tangible
<p><b>Individual level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide range of civic skills and motivations encouraged</li> <li>• Confidence, optimism, psychological wellness &amp; resiliency fostered</li> <li>• Positive sense of self and identity</li> <li>• Youth leadership &amp; decision-making opportunities created</li> <li>• Social and political development through critical consciousness</li> <li>• Academic engagement increased</li> </ul> <p><b>Collective level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the personal political: nurture collective identities</li> <li>• Social capital strengthened</li> <li>• Political networks &amp; norms developed &amp; become social resources for community improvement</li> <li>• Foster awareness of influence of social forces &amp; structures on individual behaviour: deep critical analysis &amp; reflection on power &amp; privilege</li> </ul> <p><b>Society level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim to build social movement for change through connecting with allied groups</li> <li>• Deliberate focus on policy change for social justice</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identification of tangible goals for social change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth choose issues that are meaningful and relevant to their lives</li> <li>• Target specific institutional changes &amp; public policy</li> </ul> <p><b>Coherent strategy for reaching goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make connections between larger social issues &amp; young people's everyday lives</li> <li>• Sociopolitical education supports critical thinking skills, &amp; develops values &amp; attitudes to take action</li> <li>• Meaningful connections between youth and adults through cross-age collaborations</li> <li>• Create joint solutions – focus on the collective rather than the individual</li> </ul> <p><b>Belief in power of groups to effect change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate the small successes &amp; tiny wins</li> <li>• Knowledge of other successful strategies &amp; campaigns</li> </ul>

Flanagan and Levine (2010) argue that youth organising and activism projects are distinct from other forms of civic engagement such as service or volunteer work and political advocacy on behalf of youth because the projects are defined and lead by the young people themselves. Adults are involved, but “young people are the agents of change” (p.189). There is agreement in the literature about the significance of cross-age collaborations in youth activism. Kirshner’s (2007) focus on youth activism groups in urban communities acknowledges the significance of collaborations between young adults (typically in their twenties) and adolescents, particularly as age segregation is common in modern society and opportunities for meaningful connections between youth and adults are diminishing. This theme recurs in the literature in various forms such as the role of adult allies (Coe, Goicolea, Hurtig & San Sebastian, 2015; Hart & Gullan, 2010), the idea of the young person as an apprentice (Torney-Purta et al., 2010) and intergenerational partnering (Ginwright et al., 2005; Ginwright, 2007). There is also recognition in the youth civic engagement literature that these cross-age collaborations are fraught with difficulties, particularly when adults are reluctant to relinquish control of processes and recognise youth as equals (Coe et al., 2015).

Shaw et al. (2014) point out that youth participation can bring benefits to both the individuals involved as well as their communities, but this is not automatic: “such engagement requires the existence of an environment comprised of supportive groups, organizations and communities that provide opportunities for young people to connect with others, engage in meaningful activities, develop skills, and feel safe, secure, and valued” (p.311). As I stated in Chapter 1, there are researchers within the youth development and civic engagement fields who have critiqued the literature for its predominant focus on purely individual behaviours of engagement to the detriment of examining the collective responses of youth within their communities (Ginwright et al., 2005). There are a growing number of studies which acknowledge the importance of youth activism at the collective/community level (see Lewis-Charp, Yu & Soukamneuth, 2006; Shaw et al., 2014) but the majority of studies focus on individual development (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012).

A second major theme in literature examining youth activism settings is that transformative social change is made tangible to young people: it is framed as a series of small, achievable goals with a focus on the collective power of groups of everyday people to act strategically for success (Kirshner, 2007; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Lewis-Charp et al., 2006). This process involves learning about socio-political contexts and structures, supporting critical thinking skills, and developing values and attitudes to take action for social change. A few scholars link this process to Paulo Freire’s construct of *critical consciousness* but as Watts, Diemar and Voight (2011) argue, “it deserves more attention in research and discourse on youth political and civic development” (p.43). Watts et al. (2011) describe critical consciousness as having three components - critical reflection, political efficacy and critical action:

*Critical reflection* refers to a social analysis and moral rejection on societal inequities, such as social, economic, racial/ethnic, and genders inequities that constrain well-being and human agency. Those who are critically reflective view social problems and inequalities in system terms. *Political efficacy* is the perceived capacity to effect social and political change by individual and/or collective activism. It follows that people will be much more likely to engage in critical action if they feel that they can create change. *Critical action* refers to individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society, such as institutional policies and practices, which are perceived to be unjust. This is a broad view of activism that includes participation in activities

such as voting, community organizing, and peaceful protests. (pp.46-7, original emphasis)

It is the integration of these components that make critical consciousness important to youth activism practices and research. Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) argue that critical consciousness is attained “through learning processes initiated by individuals, either youth or adults, working within organizational contexts” (p.707). They call these learning processes *critical social praxis*. The next chapter explores both critical consciousness and praxis in depth and explains how they are fundamental in the theoretical positioning of this thesis.

It is also worth noting that research also shows that activism cannot be contained by or assigned to one particular setting, as young people move between multiple settings in their lives. The concept of *staging-grounds* (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2007) is a model in which the indirect influences of a school are “powerful but mediated” (p.1215) by communication with families and peer groups. McDevitt and Kiousis focus on the nature of political learning and the role of high schools as a staging-ground in civic identity construction. They argue that the classroom is the place where youth are exposed to political ideas and discuss topical issues, but it is subsequent discussion with families and peer groups that is more influential. They call this intersphere interaction: an “integrative, synergistic dynamic in which students act as conduits for the flow of political communication among schools, families, and peers” (p.1227). Moreover, McDevitt and Kiousis’s study found that the young people who discussed political and civic ideas with their peers (rather than families) were motivated to take action beyond conventional participatory modes such as voting. In short, they identified with activism.

### **The discourse of democratic citizen**

The most prevalent discourse of civic engagement in the literature, and especially in a New Zealand context, is that of the democratic citizen. Shaw et al. (2014) argue that the

fundamental premise of this discourse is that the active involvement of individuals is important for society as it enhances the vibrancy of democracy. In fact, for a democracy to survive, its citizens must participate. From a societal point of view, it is argued that the participation of young people is important to ensure that the democratic process is inclusive, energized, and renewed. (p.304)



Within the discourse of the democratic citizen, there are differing messages about the kind of citizen that is desirable in a democratic nation. These messages are shaped by a variety of factors, including how democracy is defined, beliefs about what citizenship is and what forms participation can take (Gilbert, 2004). Significantly, the literature explores society's attitudes and values towards young people as citizens and the way that they participate in society. There is a distinction between what is acceptable or desirable civic participation – the good citizen acts in these ways – and what is deemed to be action that threatens or undermines the stability of society – the bad activist takes part in such activities. The work of Kennelly (2008) is significant in exploring this discourse. Her book *Citizen Youth* focuses “on how the symbolic elements associated with state desires for youth citizenship function, at least in part, to placate youth activism into acceptable forms of liberal individualism” (p.9). Her qualitative study, which gathered data from 38 young people who were involved in activism directly contesting the state, revealed that the neoliberal conception of the “active citizen” and the “good citizen” of the Canadian state

is one who engages with the state through self-regulated acts of “responsible” citizenship that are limited to individual encounters with the electoral process, charitable community work, and participation through formal aspects of the political system, such as official parties. (Kennelly, 2008, p.71)

Yet there are contradictory messages around what it means to engage in activism, Kennelly argues. As being a good citizen includes acts of charity, and these are often portrayed in civics education and media as “activism”, engaging in activism is good. However, “those who engage in forms of activism that directly confront the state and its policies are represented as maniacs – so activism is bad” (p.71). Stornaiuolo and Thomas (2017) observe that young people's social action and advocacy through participatory media such as Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram “often goes unheralded, invisible until it is viewed as disruptive of schooling or society” (p.338). Studies show that these social and cultural portrayals of activism impact on young people self-identifying as activists. Some readily adopt the identity, while many are reluctant to self-identify with the label despite their actions and commitments (Fisher, 2015; Kennelly, 2008; Manning, 2010; Schuster, 2013).

## **Negotiating activist identities**

The concept of identity is either explicitly or implicitly present in all of the literature I have read. Depending on the disciplinary background of the writer, identity is approached as either a psychological or sociological construct. For this study I am interested in the sociological understanding of identity as “a product of the interaction between the individual and society that prioritises the social and collective” (Siteine, 2013). There is much discussion in the literature from this perspective about the social factors that influence the development of identity and there is widespread agreement that individuals do not have static or fixed identities, rather they are in a constant state of creation and negotiation: becoming. Identity, in this perspective, is a performance that is contextual and variable. This is especially so for young people as they engage in a period of their lives often characterised by a search for identity (Harré, 2007; Sherrod, 2010). Multicultural education scholar James Banks argues that a cumulative approach to identity development is crucial if the desire is a thoughtful citizenry who actively take part in democratic processes. He believes that unless an individual has self-acceptance and clarified cultural identifications, they cannot accept and value other cultures. Once cultural identifications are clarified, Banks argues that it is possible for diverse but unified and reflective national identifications to develop and then finally, global identifications may be developed (Banks, 2004). Under this theory, a young person who takes social action (as the maximal expression of citizenship in a democratic society) will necessarily have strong, positive and clarified cultural attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Rather than seeing culture as pertaining only to race or ethnicity, it is useful in the context of this study to conceptualise it more broadly, encompassing and embodying a range of collective and social identities.

Intersectionality theory offers another way of viewing identity. This approach claims that is vital to account for the social positioning of members of society and to challenge hegemonic positionings (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Intersectionality theory grew out of feminist scholarship which came to recognise that gender analysis did not account for the experiences of all women, and therefore a theory that examined the ways in which intersecting social, economic and political identities affect and are affected by an individual was needed. The premise is that all social realities, interactions and identities are situated spatially (in time

and place) and culturally, they are situated in gender and stage of life, and they are situated socio-economically. Any one individual at any given point in time situates their identity at the intersection of these categories, but as Yuval-Davis (2011) points out “people born into the same families and/or the same time and social environment can have different identifications and political views” (p.7). Therefore intersectionality must go beyond inter-categorical analysis and assume an intra-categorical approach at the same time. This means interrogating the concrete meanings of the categories and their boundaries in order to better understand people’s “positions and attitudes to life” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p.7). An intersectionality approach to studies exploring identity allow for analysis of self-understandings, but also the context (or situatedness) and the processes of being and becoming an activist. Interestingly, I found little reference to intersectionality theory in the youth activism literature.

Harré (2007) uses an identity projects framework to examine the contextual and experiential factors that contribute to the emergence and maintenance of an identity project of service or activism:

Identity projects emerge from all the factors that make a person. Both the broad social context and events with widespread impact – namely, our *collective context* and our *personal context*, which include our immediate social environment, family background, access to resources, and experiences – are important. Also important are our *personal characteristics*, these include our concerns, emotional tendencies, values, cognitive capacities, and physical characteristics. (Harré, 2007, p. 712, original emphasis)

A person’s commitment and action to a particular identity project of service or activism is influenced by the intensity of their experiences of belonging, stimulation, efficacy and integrity in that particular context (Harré, 2007). Significantly, Harré argues that for such a project to emerge individuals “have had some control over their contexts and likewise contexts have made imprints on the person” (p.715). Harré draws upon literature citing examples such as: parental involvement in volunteering or activism; freedom from obligations such as family responsibilities; experiences of collective crises such as natural disasters or conflict; personal experiences of injustice; belonging to religious networks; and seeking opportunities to participate through social networks. Harré also notes that participating in volunteerism or activism does not always mean that the activity is an

identity project for the young person. The identity project could be belonging to the group, rather than being an activist in the group, for example.

### **Discussions on the role of social capital**

Other studies also reinforce the importance of social and collective identities through the discussion of social capital. Hart and Gullan (2010) discuss *youth activism* as a construct “deeply embedded in psychological, social and political contexts” (p. 68), and they argue that social capital and trust have an important role to play in influencing young people to become activists. Moreover, their research suggests these two factors, social capital and trust, are significant in determining what type of action they will take: traditional or protest. Hart and Gullan (2010) use social capital in reference to Putnam’s work and define it as “the network of social relationships and connections to social institutions upon which an individual can draw” (p.72-3). They argue that, particularly in communities with large populations of minority youth who have limited social capital and a strong distrust of public officials and political institutions, it is imperative that civic engagement opportunities build young peoples’ social capital and directly address the issues of trust or confidence they have experienced with the system.

A critique of the way in which social capital theory is used in civic engagement and activist research is the lack of focus on the racial dimensions of social capital (Akom, 2006; Ginwright, 2007). Akom proposes:

the development of a new model of social capital that takes into account social practices that, due to processes of racialization and stigmatization, are usually ignored or discounted by the mainstream. Such a framework will analyze the lives of [people in low-income communities] through a broader lens that will include a variety of context-dependent variables missing from most current models of social capital, such as racial and economic inequality, poverty rates, homeownership, unemployment, under-employment, types of employment, segregation indices, youth participation, number of community-based organizations, and some measure of community history, to name a few. (p. 88)

Akom (2006) makes the argument that this model, taking into account the intersectionalities of individuals and their communities, exists in the community activism of youth in urban communities in the USA. In conceptualising social capital as something that young people in poor communities have developed through their rich social networks, there

is a direct counter to the argument that Putnam (2000) and others like Hart and Gullan (2010) have made about the decline in social capital for youth. Ginwright (2007) makes a very similar argument. He believes that for black youth to be actively involved in community change activities, *critical* social capital is necessary, whereby the collective facets of community change are emphasised and racial identity and political awareness are significant resources for youth to draw upon in becoming activists:

Critical social capital is facilitated by intergenerational advocacy that challenges negative concepts about Black youth; it is developed by building a collective racial and cultural identity; and it is sustained by cultivating an understanding of personal challenges as political issues. (Ginwright, 2007, p.404)

bell hooks (1993) would refer to this concept of critical social capital as crucial to “the construction of identity in resistance” (p.147). This idea of constructing identity in resistance is dealt with in depth in Chapter 6 of the thesis; it is, indeed, central to the argument of this thesis. In brief, constructing an identity in resistance is a process of liberation and decolonisation. hooks (1993) approaches identity through the lens of intersectionality, and as such places the subjectivities of the person as central to this construction of identity. For hooks, resistance comes in many forms, including naming “one’s identity as part of a struggle to challenge domination” (hooks, 1994, p.78). This idea resonates with the multicultural education work of Banks which was introduced earlier in this chapter, and the work of Freire, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

Social capital also appears in the literature in the work of Bronwyn Wood (2011; 2014a). Wood uses the theoretical framework of Bourdieu’s “species of capital” to explain the different ways in which young people and their teachers perceive and perform citizenship in New Zealand. Wood (2011, 2014a) argues that students actively constructed *participatory capital* and are therefore agents of transformation rather than vessels of reproduction. Participatory capital is defined as “the sum of the participatory resources (social, economic and cultural capital) gained through socialising processes and practices with school communities” (Wood, 2014a, p.593). Wood notes that her study stands out in youth participation studies due to its integrated application of Bourdieu’s capitals; most other studies focus solely on social capital. It is significant that Wood’s study, like that of Akom’s and Ginwright’s, frames young people as agentic and resourceful in the ways in which they

engage in their communities, and challenges the dominant narrative of literature which ignores the intersectional everyday experiences and realities of young people’s civic engagement.

### Performing activism – what counts as activism?

As noted, there is little agreement in the literature about what constitutes activism and what does not. Sherrod (2010), for example, asks is it activism if the status quo is challenged, but there is no specific course of action promoted? The literature often presents activism as a binary of possible actions: on one side are actions considered traditional or working within the formal sphere, affirming the political system while working to bring about social change; on the other side are those actions which are considered non-traditional or work outside the formal sphere, challenging the political system while working for social change. The commonality is that there is action for social change.

Table 2: Activism as a binary of actions

Working within the formal political sphere	Working outside the formal political sphere
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voting</li> <li>• Petitions</li> <li>• Rallies</li> <li>• Civil disobedience legally permitted (non-violent protests, sit-ins)</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social movements, voluntary services, identity organisations (e.g. Rainbow Youth, Scouts, church youth groups, volunteering at retirement homes, building community gardens)</li> <li>• Urban cultures (including those online and performative like art, music, drama, theatre, documentary/film, storytelling)</li> <li>• Militant movements: civil disobedience not legally permitted (trespassing, occupying buildings, blocking streets, destruction of property)</li> <li>• Use of violent tactics (bomb threats, arson, terrorism)</li> <li>• Everyday life (conversations, boycotting/boycotting, resistance to following trends or norms, questioning those in positions of power)</li> </ul>

Common activist behaviours that work within the formal political sphere, affirming the political system include: non-violent expressions of the right to freedom of speech such as attending rallies and protests; advocacy for causes and raising awareness through writing letters and disseminating information; and participating in democratic actions such as

signing petitions and voting. Many of these actions fall within the normative characteristics of citizenship as listed at the beginning of this chapter. As such, they are framed as acceptable forms of activism. However, the literature on youth civic participation reveals that it is typical for young people to take action “outside the formal political sphere” (Coe et al., 2015, p. 5). Common activist behaviours that fall into this category are: being involved in voluntary services, social movements and identity organisations; urban cultures; militant movements; and everyday life (Coe et al., 2015, p.5). Indeed, the role of the internet, and social media in particular, as a tool for and a site of activism that sits outside of mainstream electoral politics has received increasing academic attention in recent years (Guillard, 2016; O’Toole, 2015; Schuster, 2013; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). This body of research argues that rather than being apathetic and withdrawing from democratic life, young people are performing agency and choosing to engage through a variety of different modes.

White and Wyn (1998) argue that it is important to conceptualise youth agency from a contextual perspective in which “specific kinds of social practice...take place within certain social structural parameters (by grounding questions of agency in the historically constructed lived practices of young people)” (p.317). They present three dimensions of agency: private goals, public domain and social transformation. Effective agency embodies all three dimensions:

it involves consciousness of the potential to take action, the willingness to engage in collective action in the interests of the group and, importantly, the knowledge and willingness to challenge existing structures. Thus, agency is about knowledge, power and the ability to activate resources. (White & Wyn, 1998, p.318)

Researching youth activism requires, therefore, recognition that the ways in which young people perform agency will be particular to the lives and histories of the young people involved. It is fitting then, that there is an increasing focus in the literature on young people’s online and everyday activism.

### **Online and everyday activism**

Much of the literature on the role of the internet in civic engagement is concerned with the relationship (if any) between online activities and traditional offline political participation (Schuster, 2013). Online forms of activism have been labelled *slacktivism* or *clicktivism* by some critics, who argue that it is tokenistic and has little impact on real social change. A

small body of research studies this tension (see for example, Babera et al., 2015; Cabrera, Matius & Monteya, 2017; Christensen, 2011; Schuster, 2013). Cabrera et al. (2015) point out that political ineffectiveness is a core characteristic of slacktivism but highlight the problem in defining what is effective or ineffective behaviour as studies show that people who engage in more traditional forms of social activism also engage in slacktivism, and that typical slacktivist activities (such as liking a social media post, sharing a link, signing an online petition) are also significant to the strategies of larger advocacy groups (p.4). Babera et al.'s (2017) study of Twitter communications relating to three large scale protest events similarly argue the crucial role of slacktivists, who they call "peripheral participants", "in increasing the reach of protest messages and generating online content at levels that are comparable to core participants" (p.1). Significantly, in a New Zealand context, Schuster found that young feminists participate in online activism in a way that renders them invisible to older generations of the feminist movement who do not tend to connect and collaborate via online communities, and therefore believe that there are few young women involved in the feminist movement in New Zealand. Schuster's study frames an intergenerational divide "facilitated by age-specific ways of communicating and organizing events" (p.23). This finding reinforces the importance of maintaining an intersectional awareness.

There are a growing number of studies that herald online activism as a significant form of civic engagement, recognising more fully the ways in which young people are participating in the public sphere (Bennett, Freelon & Wells, 2010; Guillard, 2016; Mirra & Garcia, 2017; O'Toole, 2015; Schuster, 2013; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Mirra and Garcia (2017) argue that youth not only participate in civic activities in online spaces, they are shaping the very nature of a "participatory culture" (p.145). They give the examples of the range of powerful forms of civic participation, engagement and production involved in activities such as playing and designing online games, the creation of fan fiction and the use of online hashtags. This participatory culture does not merely use digital tools to engage in traditional or normative civic learning: "the kinds of civic learning that youth are already doing in online games like Minecraft or in virtual communities like Twitter are leading to new disruptions of old civics" (Mirra & Garcia, 2017, p.148). In addition to gaming and social networking sites, Bennett et al. (2010) point out the importance of political comedy



shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* as a source of news for young people in the United States. These satirical news shows are not only seen on television, but streamed online and shared via social networking. Significantly, sharing content also involves editing and mixing content to create mashups and new personalised versions of content.

The rise of digital and online technologies and media, therefore, provide new ways of engaging with issues, organising and taking action. It also provides new possibilities for youth civic engagement research to reconceptualise citizenship and expand “views on the agency of young people as participants in public life” (Mirra & Garcia, 2017, p.144). However, researchers point out that online spaces and participatory media are not equally accessible, nor are all young people given equitable opportunities to become skilled at participating in these media (Bennett et al., 2010). While acknowledging the research on the digital divide, Stornaiuolo and Thomas (2017) review articles about youth digital activism from an asset-based stance, deliberately excluding studies which frame youth inequities through a deficit lens. Table 3 provides a summary of that literature. Viewing online actions as examples of youth agency foregrounds youth perspectives and definitions, and repositions “young people as political and civic actors who produce and share content that connects their passions, interests, and identities to influence public discourse” (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017, p. 345). Moreover, research in this emerging field suggests that online participation facilitates horizontal and nonhierarchical networks of activists who are engaging in reflexive and everyday citizenship practices (Manning, 2013; O’Toole, 2015).

As Table 3 shows, the central focus of youth digital activism is *representation*: how people represent others and how people represent themselves.

Table 3: Dimensions of youth digital activism

<b>Youth social activism</b> Self-expressive, issue-oriented, interest-driven activist practices online	<b>Youth digital civic engagement</b> Civic activities online	<b>Youth participation in educational spaces oriented toward social change</b> Role of educational programmes, community organisations & adult-mediated spaces in supporting youth social activism online
<b>Cultural as political</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fan activism – participating in fictional worlds to                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Resist censorship</li> <li>○ Contest commercial interests</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Online representations                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Push back against misrepresentations &amp; create counternarratives</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Expanding definitions of active citizen</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving beyond traditional definitions (voting, contacting political representatives, volunteering, protesting)</li> <li>• Viewing youth social activism (see left column) as civic engagement and active citizenship</li> <li>• Young people redefining the nature and scope of what counts as activism</li> <li>• Young people resisting the norms of active citizenship – engaging in civil disobedience</li> </ul>	<b>Critical, transformative pedagogies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors provide scaffolding for young people to explore new forms of activism, building critical digital civic literacy through:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Intergenerational networks</li> <li>○ Apprenticeship models</li> <li>○ Community alliances</li> <li>○ Historical framing about social change across local &amp; global contexts</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Foreground restorying – young people as creators of counternarratives to disrupt dominant narratives</li> </ul>
<b>Collective action through social media</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build &amp; share knowledge                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ May not be available via mainstream media</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Find other like-minded people                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop personal &amp; group identities</li> <li>○ Build relationships &amp; solidarity</li> <li>○ Gain insight into others’ perspectives</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Plan &amp; coordinate actions                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Protest behaviour across online &amp; offline spheres</li> <li>○ Record &amp; report discrimination, injustice &amp; abuse (e.g. racism, sexual harrasment &amp; assault)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Participatory dimensions of civic practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telling stories</li> <li>• Mobilising publics</li> <li>• Managing publicity</li> <li>• Importance of popular culture &amp; peer networks</li> <li>• Private voice in public sphere – self-expression as form of public participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New tools such as podcasts &amp; blogs broaden the scope and span of mobilisation efforts                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reach more people</li> <li>○ Amplify core message</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: developed from Stornaiuolo et al., 2017, pp. 338-351.

The focus in the literature on new modes and contexts of youth civic participation such as online spaces is part of the broader interest on researching the everyday experiences and expressions of young people’s citizenship. Wood (2014b) notes the significance of feminist researchers in this shifting focus, as they have “worked to bring to light the embodied, everyday, informal practices of traditionally disempowered people” (p.216) including children and young people. The research of everyday citizenship has expanded traditional conceptions and norms of citizenship (O’Toole, 2015; Shaw et al., 2017; Thorson, 2012;

Wood, 2014b). In addition to the online action repertoires I have outlined above, research has found young people taking politicised action in individualised and networked consumer choices over what to buy or boycott (O’Toole, 2015). Manning (2013) argues that such everyday decisions are evidence of an ethico-political practice grounded in reflexivity. In other words, several young people in his study made judgements in particular circumstances and in terms of their “values/ethics/morals, rather than applying general rules or ideology to particular cases” (p.24).

Wood (2014b) found that the young people in her study were “(re)imagining and (re)defining citizenship” and social action in three main ways:

- a) collaborative, informal discussions and group interactions served to affirm their views about what “counted” as social action;
- b) peer discussions and debates captured the contested, nuanced and dynamic understandings of citizenship and social action; and
- c) visual methods highlighted the significance of familiar everyday places and spaces in young people’s experiences and understandings of citizenship as belonging, responsibility and caring.

Wood (2014b) stresses the situated and socially constructed nature of the young people’s responses and acknowledges the “imbalance in power between adults and young people in the research encounter” (pp.228-9) despite her best intentions and efforts to reduce this through the use of everyday methodologies. There is an awareness of a need for researchers to further develop and use methodological frameworks that will capture youth practices and civic agency in ways that allow for more expansive and inclusive conceptualisations of youth citizenship and civic engagement (Mirra & Garcia, 2017; Shaw et al., 2015; Thorson, 2012; Wood, 2014b). In addition, for researchers in youth organising and activism there is a call for direct action in policy spaces, working alongside young people to not only critique current policy but “put forward alternative policies that affirm youth initiatives and provide opportunities for democratic participation” and “facilitate the creation of public policies that promote and support young people’s political agency so that they may challenge and transform the oppressive conditions impeding their healthy transition into adulthood” (Ginwright et al., 2005, p.36).

Literature on youth activism in a New Zealand context is fairly limited. Beals and Wood (2012) examine “the actions and voices” of two youth activist organisations which emerged in 2005-6 in Aotearoa New Zealand. The way in which they situate this examination as a negotiation of agency by young people who are “situated in the liminal” and “can be read through moments of *tino rangatiratanga* (or self-determination)” (p.195) is of particular relevance and interest to me in framing the context of this study of youth activists in Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors focus on *youth agency*, conceptualising it as “performative”, something that is “done” and can “rewrite and reconstruct culture” (Beals & Wood, 2012, p.194). This includes actions of resistance as well as actions for positive structural change. How activism is perceived and presented depends on who is doing the reporting or which lens is used to view the actions. Beals and Wood highlight this, as does Mutch (2013a) with her youth-centric view of citizenship in action in Christchurch after the 2010/11 earthquakes. The article describes how young people spontaneously took action in the wake of the disasters to mobilise, organise and sustain civic and political participation of a large number of youth in Christchurch, and across the country. Mutch (2013a) specifically examines the actions of the Student Volunteer Army in 2010-11, offering a different perspective and an alternative narrative to the views society has of young people as disengaged and apathetic. Instead young people are presented taking collective, collaborative action at the community level. This participatory action is firmly aligned with volunteering notions of the *good citizen*. As such, the young people involved received praise from the media, the public and government. Leader, Sam Johnson was awarded Young New Zealander of the Year in 2012. The Student Volunteer Army is now a part of New Zealand cultural life, as evidenced by the introduction of the SVA Service Award in 2019 which aims to develop “a volunteering culture in New Zealand’s young people” (SVA, n.d).

Young New Zealanders have also recently been very involved in activism for policy changes to reflect the urgency of climate change. Nairn (2019) highlights the significance of the collective processes her participants identified as generating hope: a) naming climate change as a collective problem; b) being part of collective action; c) connecting to the global climate movement; and d) reaching the point where climate change is taken for granted by the majority of the population (p.11). The climate activists also experienced despair. Nairn

argues that participants' have complex relationships with despair and hope; her analysis presents how despair "educated" the activists hopes in different kinds of ways. The study draws attention to the importance of the emotional work of activism "so that young people do not carry the double burden of feeling 'individually' responsible for solving climate change and for resolving their experiences of burnout" (p.13). Moreover, Nairn (2019) calls for everyone to share the responsibility for climate action, echoing the recognition of the power of intergenerational collaborations that is present throughout the literature. McKenzie (2019) notes that youth climate action is taken in both online and offline spheres, reiterating the significance of "slacktivist" participation through FaceBook, Twitter and Instagram in motivating commitment to take further action. McKenzie sites the #StudentStrike4Climate campaign which resulted in several thousands of students striking from school to protest the lack of political urgency in dealing with climate change in New Zealand. The criticism from mainstream media and some politicians of this movement reflects the findings of Beals and Wood (2012) and Kennelly (2008; 2011) that there are clear norms of acceptable active citizenship for youth in society. McKenzie (2019) also describes the policy and advocacy work taken by young people through youth organisation Generation Zero. This activism employed traditional political strategies which were very successful: "Parliament recently passed the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act (2019), an innovative and ambitious climate policy which came out of Generation Zero" (p.117). The mainstream media response to this youth activism was far more positive.

## **Gaps identified and the case for a study examining self-understandings of young activists**

The literature reviewed identifies three gaps that I address in this thesis:

- a) self-understandings of activism;
- b) an explicit focus on the contexts in which social action takes place; and
- c) an explicit focus on the processes of activism.

These areas helped me illuminate my topic of inquiry as an important research area to contribute to. I briefly outline these gaps here. Firstly, Thorson (2012) asserts that few

citizenship studies “have directly examined self-understandings of citizenship” and frames “civic imaginings as resources for democratic practice” (p.71). She argues that it is important to understand the way young people make sense of their own civic agency because these imaginings, beliefs and expectations of self (in both private life and the public world) will influence their civic and political behaviour. Secondly, Torney-Purta et al. (2010) state that a limited number of studies “have an explicit focus on context in spite of the fact that it is clear that the political, economic, and social contexts of a given historical period, as well as the context of the power structure of a given school or community, are important for understanding political and civic engagement” (p.501-2). The third gap, also highlighted by Torney-Purta et al., is the lack of studies dealing with the underlying processes of civic engagement in an explicit way. They point out the limitations of research which aims to decide which socialisation agent was the most important, rather than considering “issues of process or the relationships among socialization agents” (p.502). This study explicitly focuses on the individual’s understandings, as well as the context and the process.

There is very limited literature that specifically looks at youth activism in an Aotearoa New Zealand context, and none that examine the self-understandings or the underlying processes of becoming a young social activist in this country. I wish to explore the complexities and subtleties of the range of action which may constitute activism and to articulate young people’s understandings in more nuanced ways. In this way, it will contribute to the emerging body of research that is concerned with young people’s everyday practices of citizenship (see O’Toole, 2015 and Wood, 2014b).

### **Summary: Key tensions and messages**

In this chapter I have presented some of the key tensions within the fields of youth civic engagement and youth activism research. I broadly conceptualise *civic engagement* as encompassing political and civil participation in society; in both the public and private spheres that a citizen operates in. It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Sherrod, 2010). I have reviewed literature that focuses on youth activism as an important form of civic engagement, while acknowledging that this is not a position that all researchers in the field would agree with. A further tension I have identified centres around what counts as

activism, particularly given the acceptable forms of active citizenship are largely measured by normative characteristics of civic engagement. I have focused on the literature which seeks to challenge and expand the definitions and understandings of youth civic engagement, and activism.<sup>4</sup>

I have highlighted that youth are performing agency in a variety of ways and across various settings and contexts. Much of the youth activism literature I have reviewed focuses on youth organising in low-income, urban marginalised communities which have been traditionally framed through deficit lenses and dominant narratives of apathy. This research explicitly rejects these assumptions and instead explores youth activism as an essential force in bringing about transformative social change. The literature reviewed establishes that an integral part of youth activist groups is affirming personal and social identities and nurturing collective identities. The building of networks and intergenerational partnerships features strongly throughout the studies and is often expressed in terms of developing social capital that is a community resource to draw upon. The need for critical social capital whereby critical consciousness is a significant resource for young people is highlighted in key studies.

This literature review has also foregrounded that the social, cultural and relational histories that inform young people's experiences of social action in specific spatial and temporal contexts are important. There is increasing interest in the everyday understandings and practices of young people's citizenship and activism. This research asserts the significance of youth digital activism in the work of transformative social change. The next chapter describes the theoretical and methodological choices I made in order to address this specific area of research.

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the literature reviewed is predominately, but not exclusively, within Western neoliberal democratic contexts. I found considerably more research in youth activism and youth civic engagement in the context of the United States (U.S.) than other Western democracies.

# Chapter 3 - Research design: theoretical and methodological frameworks

As presented in the introduction, this study looks to illuminate young people's understandings and experiences of taking social action for social justice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Following the process of constructivist grounded theory, this analytic and methodological process drove the substantive theory as to how young activists navigate towards social justice horizons. Correspondingly, I organise this chapter around the four major underpinnings of research design articulated by Crotty (1998): epistemology; theoretical perspective; methodology; and method.

I divide the chapter into three main parts. Part I explains the theoretical framework which underpins this study. Central to this section are the epistemological claims of social constructionism and critical theory, and the work of Paulo Freire. The nature of Freire's constructivist views on knowledge, being human and education reinforces the suitability of his work as a theoretical framework for this constructivist grounded theory study.

Part II outlines the methodological framework and method. It elaborates on how this study uses constructivist grounded theory as a research approach and the constant comparative processes involved in carrying out the data collection, analyses and substantive theory development. Grounded theory is referred to as a method, methodology and a combination of method/methodology within the academic literature. I use it in the latter sense to encompass both the methodology and the method of research with an emphasis on how the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling helped to guide the concurrent processes of analysis and data collection.

Part III concludes the chapter. It presents the recruitment processes, limitations of the study, ethical considerations and a reflection on the importance of reflexivity to the constructivist grounded theory method.



## **Part I – Epistemological and theoretical frameworks**

Central to outlining my approach is the articulation of Freire’s work that informs the conceptual, methodological and ethical commitments of this thesis. In this section I place considerable emphasis on his ideas such as conscientisation, praxis, dialogical education, critical hope and radical democracy, as these ground the ways in which I interacted with participants, analysed the data and ultimately developed my grounded theory. Central to these ideas is that I locate myself within these commitments. In Part II, I return to these ideas to illustrate how I used the constant comparative method, theoretical sampling, memo writing and coding to guide my constructivist grounded theory.

Creswell (2007) asks, “In the practice of designing or conducting qualitative research, how are assumptions, paradigms, and interpretative and/or theoretical frameworks used?” (p.16). I believe it is important as a researcher to acknowledge the assumptions that I hold going into this study. Through stating my value positions I am acknowledging potential bias, which exists “in relation to the undue influence of opinion, but also especially from a lack of reflection on the values held by the researcher” (Griffiths, 1998, p. 47). My epistemological stance aligns with a social constructionist perspective, which views knowledge as constructed rather than discovered (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2003). Burr (2003) argues that while there is no one definition of social constructionism, there are certain characteristics or features that identify a social constructionist approach:

1. A critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge
2. A belief in the historical and cultural specificities of ways of understanding
3. A view that knowledge is sustained by social processes, particularly language
4. A view that knowledge and social action go together

This study is underpinned by all four of these assumptions as it seeks to understand the ways in which young social activists make sense of their experiences in early twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand. A social constructionist perspective recognises that meaning, for both the participants and the researcher, is constructed through the ongoing interactions that individuals have with the social world. The social processes of understanding the young people who take social action highlight the relationship between

the researcher and participants in the production of knowledge. It is particularly significant in this study that constructing knowledge is recognised as a form of social action; the particular ways of understanding the world will produce particular ways of performing agency and taking social action. As Burr states,

Our constructions of the world are...bound up with power relations because they have implications for what it is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others. (2003, p. 5)

As the previous chapter outlines, the aim of this study is to examine the processes and the structures of youth activism in Aotearoa New Zealand. While social constructionism allows for the exploration of the dynamics of social interaction, it focuses more on processes than structures (Burr, 2003). A social constructionist stance would not sufficiently account for the ways in which young people have their agency constrained and empowered in different contexts. It was clear that I also needed a critical theory framework to more explicitly examine the structures in which the processes of the young activist's lived experiences are constructed.

A critical theory frame is "concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 90). Critical theorists explicitly seek to understand the ways in which the interaction of these structural elements create and maintain inequities in society in order to transform society to be more equitable (Anyon, 2009; Apple, 2013). As this thesis explicitly seeks to understand the ways in which young people who take action for social justice in their communities are able to perform their activism and navigate structural inequities, critical theory provides a strong platform through which to do so.

The term critical theory is first associated with the work of the members of the Frankfurt School of sociology in the 1930s, who sought to establish a critique of society with the aim of changing it, rather than merely describing or understanding it (Tatebe, 2017). In the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, critical theory is frequently employed to make sense of the performance of young people's citizenship, civic engagement and activism. As already

noted, these studies often examine the degree to which structure or agency mediate young people's participation, rather than the examining the interactions of structural elements upon youth agency. This use of critical theory would not help develop the new understandings that this study seeks to make. However, through the constructivist grounded theory approach of this study, the work of Paulo Freire emerged as the most useful theoretical framework to understand both the processes of being and becoming young social activists and the interacting structural elements that constrain and enable those processes.

### **A Freirean framework**

Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire was one of the most influential writers and thinkers in the field of education in the twentieth century (Irwin, 2012) and his work continues to be significant to radical and liberal educators (Giroux, 1993) as well as a variety of other academic and practical domains that advocate for social change (McLaren & Leonard, 1993; Roberts, 2010). Freire's educational philosophy has also become synonymous with critical pedagogy, and forms the basis of practices such as critical thinking and critical literacy (Giroux, 1993). The popularity of his ideas, however, have meant that they are often reduced to a model, method or technique rather than the complex pedagogical practice and philosophical framework they are intended to be (Roberts, 2010). Freire himself wanted his ideas to be treated as "a series of principles which must be constantly reformulated, in that different, constantly changing situations demand that the principles be interpreted in a different way" (Freire & Faundez, 1998, p.216-7). Thus Freire invites engagement with his work, recognising that his ideas cannot be applied in new contexts without taking into account the realities of those contexts: "It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please tell...educators not to import me. Ask them to re-create and rewrite my ideas" (Freire, Araújo Freire & Macedo, 1998, p.6). It is my aim to do so in this thesis.

Before I explain some of the central tenants of Freire's framework, I describe how I came to choose Freire as the underpinning theorist for this thesis. I had been aware of Freire and his significance to critical studies in education when I began my doctoral journey but as seen in the literature review in the previous chapter his work is not an analytical framework

frequently chosen in existing research on civic engagement, youth activism and citizenship education. It was while undertaking the process of grounded theory analysis that I noticed a process of conscientisation emerging from the data: the lived experiences of the participants provided rich examples of the development of their own critical consciousness as well as a strong desire to stimulate and facilitate the critical consciousness of others. As this connection between the data and Freire's ideas became stronger, I deliberately searched for prior research connecting conscientisation, youth activism and civic engagement. I found a handful of published pieces, including one by Watts, Diemer and Voight (2011) who argue that critical consciousness has potential for "informing youth development and activism" (p.44) and that it "deserves more attention in research and discourse on youth political and civic development" (p.43). I agree with them. In the discussion chapter of this thesis I examine the ways in which conscientisation is a useful construct to understand the lived experiences of young social activists in twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand. Here, I give a brief summary of what this concept of conscientisation means and how it intersects with a few other key principles of Freire's philosophy that are relevant to this study.

### **Freire's worldview**

The struggle for democracy is the centerpiece for the struggle for liberation.  
(Freire, 1993, p. xi)

As already stated, I am particularly interested in Freire's concept of *conscientisation* and how this process incorporates his ideas of *praxis* and *dialogical education* in the pursuit of *humanisation*. I will focus on these four ideas in this overview of Freire's work, but as Roberts (2010) states, it is impossible to separate Freire's educational ideas from his ontology, epistemology and ethic. And these cannot be separated from his lived experiences (McLaren & Leonard, 1993). Freire's epistemological and theoretical commitments are foundational to this grounded theory study which examines the lived experiences and self-understandings of young social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Freire, born in 1921, grew up in the northeast of Brazil in a loving and supportive family. The sudden death of his father when he was 13 changed the family circumstances and young

Freire saw the struggle of his mother as she worked to provide for her four children. His education at secondary level would have been impossible without a scholarship. Reflecting upon the significance of the generosity of the school owner and his wife who provided that scholarship, Freire states: “They were the ones who created the necessary conditions for my development....It is obvious that they could not have made me, but the dimensions of my individual experience have a great deal to do with them” (Freire et al., 1998, p.15). As Freire moved from student to teacher, first in schools and then in adult education, he became acutely aware of the need for literacy education for the masses of the working class, who, in mid-twentieth century Brazil, were largely rural agricultural workers. He had also experienced the difficulties of learning when living in impoverished conditions after his father died: “My social conditions did not permit me to get educated” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.29). He was steadfast in his conviction that education is political (Freire, 1993). Freire understood the relationship between class and opportunity, and the vital role of education in enabling one to overcome limitations due to one’s circumstances and the oppressor/oppressed duality at any given point in time.

### ***Humanisation through conscientisation and praxis***

The overcoming of *limit situations* is central to Freire’s understanding of what it is to be human. He argued that the ontological calling of humans is to become more fully human – a ceaseless process he calls *humanisation* (Freire, 2000). To be more fully human meant to struggle to be free and to create history and culture while knowing that history and culture also created and shaped humans. Central to this process of becoming more fully human is what Freire called *conscientisation*: a process through which one learns “to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2000, p. 35). It is also frequently referred to as critical consciousness in the literature. Once humans are engaged in conscientisation, Freire (2000; 2005a) argues that humans are capable of transforming the world because they understand the oppressive and dialectical reality of it.

Freire placed the Marxian philosophy of *praxis* at the heart of this transformation (Glass, 2001). Freire defined praxis as “critical reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2000, p.51) and argued it was a necessary condition of freedom. He

stresses the importance of both processes of praxis – the reflection and the action – in the transformation of oppressive structures, and crucially, argues that praxis is the work of the people who require the world to be transformed in order to be more fully human. That is, praxis must be undertaken by those who are oppressed. There is also a place in the struggle for people who are in solidarity with the oppressed, and Freire argues that together, the oppressed and those in solidarity with them, “must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle” (2000, p.51). He acknowledges that this will not be easy, as indicated in the choice of the word “struggle” and in the recognition that the oppressors and the structures they have created will not allow their power to be challenged and diminished. As he argues, the way that the historical process functions is that the oppressed are also the oppressors: “One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness” (Freire, 2000, p.51). The duality of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction means that there is a constant dialectical tension or conflict which Freire called the “fear of freedom” (Freire, 2000, p.46). That is the struggle for liberation. To further highlight the difficulty of the project, he uses the metaphor of a woman in labour: “Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one” (Freire, 2000, p.49). Though not easy, praxis is vital in the process of conscientisation and the realisation of becoming more fully human.

### ***Dialogical education as a practice of freedom***

Through his experiences Freire understood that education could bring about freedom or it could perpetuate the historical and cultural limitations of people’s current situations. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire details the characteristics of these oppositional methods of education:

Table 4: Freire's conceptualisations of problem-posing and banking methods of education

Problem-posing education	Banking education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A humanising and liberating praxis</li> <li>▪ Dialogical relations between teacher-student and student-teacher                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ students are critical co-investigators in dialogue with teachers</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ involves a constant unveiling of reality</li> <li>▪ strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality</li> <li>▪ does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vertical patterns of power – teacher has authority over                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ students</li> <li>▪ knowledge</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Teachers are narrators</li> <li>▪ Students are docile listeners who memorise mechanically</li> <li>▪ anesthetises and inhibits creative power</li> <li>▪ attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness</li> </ul>

Source: developed from Freire, 2000, pp. 71-86

Freire argued that problem-posing and knowledge-seeking education is the only way for liberation to be brought about. Such an education requires dialogue, which is more than having a conversation:

Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. ...Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can then act critically to transform reality. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.98-9)

In dialogical education, teachers and students, whether in a classroom situation or not, engage in democratic conversations, where the purpose of communication is to illuminate reality and to challenge the status quo (Shor & Freire, 1987). Freire believes that teachers and students are partners in this relationship, the teacher taking “the role of student among students” (2000, p.75). Therefore, the teacher cannot be the expert, the holder of knowledge who will deposit knowledge into their students’ empty minds in a one-way transaction that Freire calls “banking education”. Dialogical education is concerned with problem-posing not deposit-making (Freire, 2000). It is a structured and rigorous approach to learning and Freire argues that: “To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 102). The teacher enters into the dialogue with knowledge and has learning goals for the students. The dialogue is thus crafted in a way that invites and encourages student questioning and problematising of the topic. It also involves listening and reflecting, without a requirement that every person speak. Dialogical education respects the rights of an individual to be silent, but must also emphasise the responsibility of individuals to

participate, and to do so without sabotaging the process (Shor & Freire, 1987). Situating dialogue in the culture, politics, language and themes of the students, Shor and Freire (1987) argue, allows for the interrogation of the social and historical contexts of those subjective experiences. This is a knowledge-seeking process, an inquiry into the dialectical reality of the world and the systems of power that underpin those realities. Thus, a dialogical education is clearly integral to conscientisation, but it cannot be separated from Freire's idea of praxis. Problem-posing, knowledge-seeking education cannot be devoid of action intent upon transformative change. Ultimately, to liberate themselves, and others, people must develop critical consciousness: they must understand the reality of the world and act to change the structures that create the inequality. This requires that they have hope.

### ***The role of critical hope and radical democracy in becoming more fully human***

hope is an ontological need... We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water. (Freire, 1994, p.8)

Freire's work is foundational to the concept of *critical hope* in education (Zembylas, 2014; Giroux, 2003). Writers advocating for critical pedagogy approaches have also advocated that the cultivation of hope is a necessity (Giroux, 1997; hooks, 2003). The alternative, a lack of hope, or hopelessness can amount to despair when we believe that there is no point in struggling to change the world; it is despair that stifles curiosity, holds us back from struggling for liberation and prevents us from becoming more fully human. Yet, even in hopelessness, Freire argued, hope can and "must be rebuilt" (2014, p.30). This rebuilding and cultivating of hope is, however, not naïve hope. It is critical hope, a knowledge of the potential possibilities of humanisation and dehumanisation. Critical hope is therefore a part of conscientisation, praxis and dialogical education. It provides a significant lens to view the experiences of the young social activists in this constructivist grounded theory.

The final concept in Freire's body of work that I wish to draw attention to in this framing of the epistemic and theoretical commitments of the study is that of *radical democracy*. Freire argues for the possibility of a concrete utopian reality that is governed by radical democracy (Freire, 2007; 2014). He describes utopia as "a less perverse society" (2007, p.82) in that



society is reinvented to be “more human, less ugly, toward making ugliness into beauty” (2014, p.26). For Freire, conscientisation – imbued with critical hope – is fundamental to the realisation of that radically democratic society. Dialogical education – situated within a pedagogy of hope – is also fundamental to the realisation of that utopia. In turn radical democracy provides the necessary conditions for individuals to achieve their freedom and become more fully human.

The significance of these ideas of Freire’s emerged throughout the grounded theory methodology, reinforcing the constructivist nature of the research design and illustrating my commitments to the social constructionist and critical theory framework of the study. In this section I have described several key concepts of Freire’s work. At its heart, Freire’s worldview is based upon the epistemological belief that human beings create history and culture: they are active participants in the production of knowledge. This means that they can transform the structures that have been created, but only once they have learned that they exist and that they can be changed. This conscientisation involves praxis, a reflection and action upon the world, that can be achieved through dialogical education which in turn generates critical hope and the possibility of a radically democratic society where citizens can become more fully human.

## **Part II - Methodological framework**

Now that I have outlined how Freire’s work and my epistemic approach inform the study, Part II of this chapter outlines the methodological framework, research methods and the overall process of analysing the rich data from the 13 participants to develop a substantive grounded theory as to how young people navigate towards social justice horizons. I break this down by introducing the specific commitments of a constructivist grounded theory study as it relates to data analysis and the development of an emergent theory. I extend the comments on reflexivity from Part I to further illustrate how I maintained a reflexive and responsive awareness throughout the analytic processes. I then transition to outline the methods of this thesis which incorporate recruitment, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and an ethics in practice.

### **Grounded theory – a constructivist approach**

Grounded theory methodology provides researchers with a process for conducting qualitative research and creates a chain of evidence to show how the researcher responds to the emergent ideas as the study progresses (Urquhart, 2007). It is essentially about developing theory that is grounded in the data. This is achieved through the iterative process of the constant comparative method:

a method of analysis that generates successively more abstract concepts and theories through inductive processes of comparing data with data, data with category, category with category, and category to concept. Comparisons then constitute each stage of analytic development. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a, p.607)

The inductive analytical processes lead to theorising how meanings, actions and social structures are constructed (Charmaz, 2006). It is important that the researcher does not impose preconceived ideas upon the data: “extant concepts should earn their way into a grounded theory analysis” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b, p.9). As it was my intention to draw upon the experiences of young people from across Aotearoa New Zealand, taking social action on varied social justice issues and in varied contexts, it made sense to use constructivist grounded theory as an overall research strategy.

Constructivist grounded theory, developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006, 2014), is a second generation development of the approach from the classic grounded theory method espoused initially by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007b) Glaser and Strauss parted ways, pursuing different paths in their application and explanation of grounded theory method, especially in regard to data coding. Strauss and his new research partner, Corbin, subsequently approached grounded theory methods in distinctly different ways. Creswell (2012) states that Glaser (1992) was critical of the approach that Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocated, arguing that it was focused too much on structures and procedures rather than on theory generation.

There have since been numerous variations of the method, generally falling within three traditions of Glaserian, Strauss and Corbin, and constructivist orientations (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b). Both grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory have been critiqued for their focus on inductive procedural approaches and the claim that grounded theory is actually theory (for example, see Thomas & James, 2006). However, I selected the

constructivist approach as Charmaz (2006) emphasises “flexible guidelines, not methodological rules, recipes, and requirements” (p.9). As Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) maintain: “Constructivists study how participants construct meanings and actions from as close to the inside of the experience as possible” (p.3).

These perspectives were central to my study as I was looking to understand the experiences and perspectives of young activists who came from a range of different social, political and cultural backgrounds (this is outlined further in the recruitment and sampling section later in this chapter). Crucially, much of the literature on youth activism has focused on particular movements, or individuals within particular youth organisations. As my focus was more on the young people themselves rather than a specific social movement or organisation, constructivist grounded theory provided a means for me to understand their own meanings and histories that have created the staging-grounds outlined in Chapter 2.

Grounded theory methods have been used increasingly by qualitative researchers in their studies of social justice issues (Charmaz, 2014). The combination of the analytic focus of grounded theory and the critical stance in social justice research “broadens and sharpens the scope of the inquiry”, according to Charmaz (2014, p.326). My decision to use constructivist grounded theory methods allows me to systematically analyse the subjective experiences of my participants within particular environments and social conditions; it supplies me with the tools to move beyond descriptions of those experiences and the conditions in which they occur to make substantive theoretical statements which are anchored in the empirical contexts from which they emerged. As this study aims to understand young people’s views of social justice and how they enact social change, I felt that this would be the most effective research approach to use.

In the subheadings that follow, I first outline the analytic processes of grounded theory. While these are at times concurrent, I have separated each process as a distinct section before returning to how I then placed these together. To do this, I outline the initial and focused coding processes, the development of categories and ultimately how this drove an emergent understanding of the substantive grounded theory concept: how young people navigate towards social justice horizons. Within this I outline how memo writing, the

constant comparative method, reflexivity and theoretical sampling informed the emergent analysis and how I gradually elevated the analytic rendering of the participants' voices.

### **Data analysis: Constant comparative method**

The processes of analysing the data followed a constant comparative method as described by Charmaz (2006; 2014). As already established, the constant comparative method is something that distinguishes grounded theory from other qualitative approaches. It requires a concurrent commitment to data analysis and collection to ensure that the analysis is responding to the emergent voices and perspectives of the participants.

In the sections that follow, I outline how I used the constant comparative method across initial coding, focused coding, developing categories and the generation of the core concept of this thesis. I articulate how memo writing and theoretical sampling provided further insights and a process to check my emergent analysis was not premature and was grounded in the data. I gathered data from three participants in fairly quick succession before beginning initial coding. Subsequently, the data from each participant was coded prior to meeting with the next participant, allowing for emergent categories to be elicited in those intensive interviews. Overall, the design of constructivist grounded theory provides flexibility, allowing for multiple interactions with participants and following theoretical possibilities as these emerged.

### ***Initial coding***

Charmaz (2014) states that “through coding, you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (p.113, original emphasis). I began by carrying out what Charmaz (2014) calls initial coding, where each participant's contributions were analysed line-by-line and given an initial code. I printed each transcript and hand coded line by line. This approach helped me to stay open to exploring whatever ideas and possibilities emerged from the data. As suggested by Charmaz (2014) my initial codes were words reflecting action (often through gerunds) and they were simple, precise and short. For example: “finding a solution”; “locating self within group/collective”; “acknowledging privilege”; “identifying safety as an issue”; “locating self as ordinary”. The development of these codes in my thesis were done fairly quickly in a line by line approach. This meant that

I often developed several hundred to even more than one thousand initial codes in the margins of the interview transcripts. I could then look at these codes as part of the constant comparative method and memo writing (discussed next) to inform my emergent analysis. As I outline in the next section, this provided the basis to inform my focused coding commitments.

I acknowledge the implicit sensitising concepts that were starting points for initiating my analysis as this was a social justice inquiry and I was highly attuned to noticing concepts and ideas from my framing of the social issue I wanted to research (Charmaz, 2014). However, the line by line coding meant that the codes were grounded in the data rather than any pre-existing codes. To help with this process, Charmaz (2014) advocates working quickly while conducting initial coding. After completing line by line coding, I compared the initial codes throughout the full interview transcript and between interviews as per the constant comparative process. Initial codes are also provisional, as they may require changing or adjusting to better fit the data as the process progresses (Charmaz, 2014).

### ***Memo writing***

In addition to the analysis of data collected from participants, constructivist grounded theory places great importance on researcher memo-writing and diagramming as central to the ongoing process of data analysis (across all stages of this emergent process). As Charmaz (2006) states: “memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and direction for you to pursue” (p.72). I made extensive use of memo-writing and diagramming to interrogate the meaning of my data and acknowledge the constructivist nature of the process. It reflects the social, epistemological and research locations of this study and it locates the data in time, place, culture and context (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

As coding takes place, Charmaz (2006) suggests that researchers also break from the data and write memos to clarify the research problem and allow for insights from the data and its context to surface. “Memos provide ways to compare data, to explore ideas about the codes, and to direct further data-gathering” (p.12). This adds another layer of data to the analysis as studying memos points to gaps that need filling.

The majority of my memos took the form of mind-maps and diagrams (for example, see Figure 2). Once I had completed the initial coding of the first four interviews, I felt I needed a more visual way of comparing codes with codes so I sat with each coded transcript and drew an A3 mind-map summary, moving through a process of constant comparative analysis to create an overview of the initial codes which stood out for each participant. I continued to create these summary diagrams after completing the initial coding of every transcript and stuck them on the wall behind my computer. Every day I looked at these overviews, compared them with each other and added colour and arrows, and newly created focused codes where they emerged.

Figure 2: Mind-map memo after initial coding with Rose



This memo process allowed me to begin to start moving from the initial codes into a type of incident-with-incident coding and then focused codes. The mind-map process was immensely productive for me as I engaged with the large amounts of data from each

participant and selected the initial codes that were emerging as significant from these first few interviews. During this process I began to compare the mind-map memos, looking to see what theoretical concepts were emerging from the focused coding. As I was doing so, I felt the need to write longer more detailed memos about particular focused codes as they were emerging. Here is an excerpt from a memo I titled “Being a minority/being othered” on 10 October 2016, after I had interviewed six participants:

*It has just struck me that all 6 participants identify as a minority in some way:*

*Henare – Māori*

*Connor – takatāpui (member of rainbow community)*

*Tabby – member of rainbow community*

*Mike – learning disability*

*Adam – Māori who “can pass as white”*

*Molly – Steiner school, “never fitted into the box”*

*I have this idea but I need to be careful that I’m not reading into the data because it fits nicely for me. Does Molly really see herself as a minority, for example? She acknowledges her privilege multiple times. Can she think of herself as privileged as well as being a minority or being ‘othered’ in some way? Does she think this way, is more to the point here? Do her educational experiences give her a feeling of being ‘other’ to her peers, in a way that makes (or made) her feel empathy with those who are oppressed or othered?... So my question for my data and my future participants is this too – have they experienced being ‘othered’ or injustice in some way? I’m trying to identify a trigger or influence in switching on this empathy that they (and I!) have for social issues... All would also agree that by being YOUNG they are Othered by the rest of adult society. And this has different challenges for them personally and in what they are trying to achieve in collectives.*

When I then interviewed subsequent participants, I was aware of looking out for experiences of feeling Othered or being excluded in some way, and asked participants to delve into these experiences in more detail if they were willing to.

The fact that this initial code forms a major part of the category “Connection”, through the themes of belonging and exclusion, shows the importance of memo-writing and diagramming as an analytic tool. The fact that the participants in the focus group during theoretical sampling raise and discuss this theme among themselves after noticing it emerge from their common experiences and storying, highlights the significance of this

initial code. The constant comparative analysis of all data is an essential part of constructivist grounded theory methodology.

I also wrote methodological memos. For example, as I was moving from the focused coding into categorising, I wrote about a meeting I had with my supervisor, Carol, about how to move from the concrete concepts in the data to more abstract categories that will enable me to build substantive theory:

We talked about **communication** as a concept and Carol asked: *what is that about? What is the next level of that communication? It's not complex and abstract enough.* I need to now look at the node and all the data in it to analyse what is going on in that category. Is communication about **agency**? Performing agency – using their voice/body/life to communicate with others about their vision so that others are empowered to join that vision or work towards their own horizon.

As I moved towards saturation in the categories, my memos became about how to build theory. This process was once again a return to the crayons and coloured pens as I compared data and codes and thought and drew diagrams and sketches to make sense of what was happening at a theory level.

### ***Focused coding***

Charmaz states that focused coding, the second stage of coding, allows for the researcher to analyse large amounts of data by separating, sorting and synthesising the initial codes that stand out. The focused codes emerge from this process, memo-writing about the codes and “weighing their significance” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 137). In order to help facilitate this stage of analysis I decided to use the qualitative software analysis programme NVivo 8, developed by QSR International. It enabled me to work with vast amounts of text in a fairly quick and efficient manner; and made it possible for me to conduct queries not possible through hand coding.

I imported each participant transcript into NVivo and began to create “nodes” for each focused code as it emerged. This process involved selecting the text in the transcript relating to initial codes that appeared to be the most important, highlighting it and dragging



and dropping it into the relevant node. A single piece of data could be coded at multiple nodes. Nodes could be moved, merged and split as it became necessary. Nodes could be organised in hierarchies known as “trees”, enabling me to group nodes together under emerging theoretical categories.

Figure 3: Screenshot showing NVivo codes and emerging categories

Name	Sources	Referen...	Created On
▼ Activism	7	33	25/01/2017, 12:23...
● Defining activism & act...	11	60	2/02/2017, 1:26 PM
● Seeing change happen	11	35	1/02/2017, 4:29 PM
● Social media	5	20	1/02/2017, 3:53 PM
▼ AGENCY	0	0	27/03/2017, 12:10...
● Being responsive	12	38	25/01/2017, 12:18 P...
● Communicate	12	63	25/01/2017, 12:12 PM
▼ Critique	0	0	25/01/2017, 12:44...
● Critiquing education	10	36	25/01/2017, 4:55 PM
● Critiquing people	12	45	25/01/2017, 12:45...
● Critiquing system	12	112	25/01/2017, 12:44...
● Harnessing privilege	7	12	25/01/2017, 12:19 P...
● Navigating challenges	10	32	2/02/2017, 12:39 PM
● Performing agency	11	66	25/01/2017, 12:18 P...
● Resistance as action	5	8	25/01/2017, 2:55 PM
▼ Working within the syst...	9	31	25/01/2017, 12:13 P...
● Being pragmatic	7	13	25/01/2017, 12:57...
▼ CONNECTION	7	14	25/01/2017, 12:13 P...
● Being passionate	12	61	25/01/2017, 12:15 PM
● Belonging	9	27	25/01/2017, 12:20...
● Collaborating	9	22	25/01/2017, 12:56...
● Feeling connected	11	51	25/01/2017, 12:31 PM
● Showing empathy	6	8	2/02/2017, 12:18 PM
● Social capital	12	51	25/01/2017, 12:30...
▼ Empowerment	0	0	25/01/2017, 12:12 PM
● Empowering others	11	55	25/01/2017, 12:39...
● Feeling empowered	10	36	25/01/2017, 12:39...

As can be seen from the illustration above, I started to develop main categories that grouped a number of focused codes together – the focus of the next section.

**From focused coding to creating tentative categories using NVivo**

As Figure 3 above shows, through the constant comparative process, I gradually created nodes at three levels, starting with the focused codes and moving up to my tentative categories. For example, the nodes “critiquing education”, “critiquing people” and “critiquing system” distinguish different properties of the focused code “Critique”. This code has been elevated as one of the eight nodes of the emerging category “AGENCY”.

Once I had grouped data into the three categories of “Agency”, “Connection” and “Knowledges”, I printed out the data sets for each category and continued comparative analysis through highlighting data, creating diagrams and writing memos. I added the gerunds of performing agency, making connections and developing knowledges. I then presented these emerging categories to the eight participants of the focus group to gain further insights and understandings of the experiences of being a young social activist in New Zealand. The new data from the theoretical sampling was then imported into NVivo and analysis, memo-writing and diagramming process continued even as I began writing up my findings and forming the argument for the discussion chapters. By these later stages of analytical work, however, I found it much easier to work with the printed data of the NVivo nodes and stopped using NVivo as my primary tool for analysis.

### ***Theoretical sampling***

Theoretical sampling is a tool used by grounded theory researchers to enable them to move from the particular to the more general. It is a process of data collection for generating theory. Charmaz (2006, p.189) states that:

[The] researcher aims to develop the properties of his or her developing categories or theory, not to sample randomly selected populations or to sample representative distributions of particular people... the researcher seeks people, events, or information to illuminate and define the boundaries and relevance of the categories.

In this study, theoretical sampling emerged from my discussions with participants who indicated an interest in the opportunity to participate further in ways that best suited them. For example, I presented the opportunity to create a visual portfolio involving photographs, video, a digital presentation, a concept map or a collage/montage. These creative ways of participating were popular among a number of participants; however, the pressures of time limitations became a primary concern when considering realistically what else the young people could commit to in terms of participating in the study. I also discussed the opportunity for involvement in a focus group with other participants.

According to Charmaz and Belgrave (2012), combining individual and focus group interviews have been very effective in developing grounded theories when used strategically as the dual methodological approach can result in an iterative process of further data collection

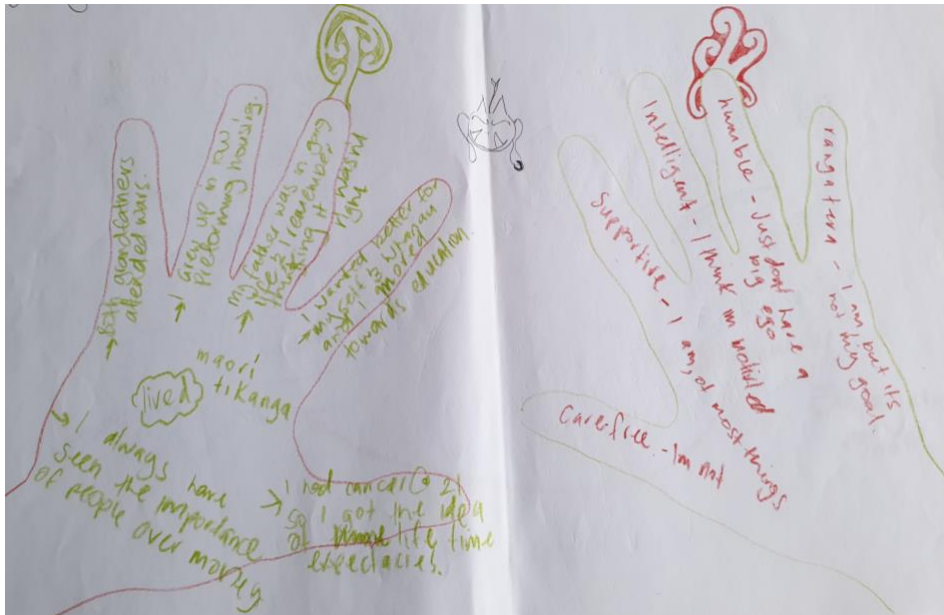
which leads to richer conceptualisations and more confidence in the validity of findings. Several participants expressed a desire to meet the other participants. Using my research fund, I arranged for them to travel to Auckland to take part in a focus group discussion. This was in part because they were curious to hear what others in the study were doing and also a way of contributing further without having to make a major time commitment that something like creating a portfolio would take. In total, eight participants were able to take part. This focus group took place following analysis of the intensive interview data of twelve participants, but before the interview of the final participant, whom I sought out after the focus group to provide further theoretical sampling to check emerging categories and the substantive theory about navigating towards social horizons that I was in the process of developing.

Drawing upon my background as a teacher, I designed three activities for the focus group to engage with the emergent categories of performing agency, making connections and developing knowledges and how these conceptual categories formed the properties of a grounded theory that young activists are navigating towards social justice horizons. The aim of the focus group was twofold: to interrogate this analysis and use it as a form of triangulation, as well as generate further rich data for theory development. The overview of the focus group meeting activities is attached as Appendix F.

The first activity was an “icebreaker” so that the members of the focus group would be able to share about themselves and their experiences with activism without it being superficial or surface level. I handed out blank pieces of A3 paper, and placed a variety of coloured pencils, crayons and coloured pens around the large table. I asked each person to draw an outline of both hands. Then I asked them to fill the left hand outline with their lived experiences that they deem important to their identities. I asked them to fill the right hand outline with words that others use to describe them, or how they are seen by others. After giving the group about seven minutes to do the activity, I had each person share what they had put in their hands. In this way, the focus group members introduced themselves and also presented some tensions in the way they see themselves and the way they are perceived by others. This generated rich and deep discussions about what is most important to them in their understanding of themselves and their experiences. I was struck

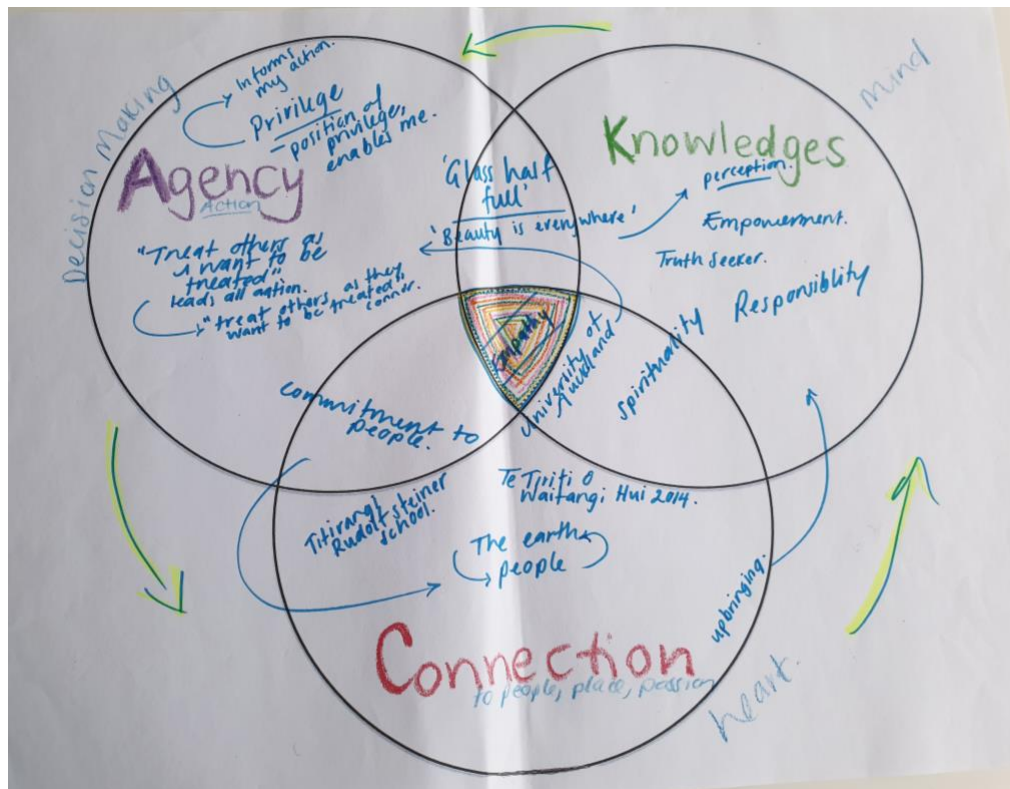
at how closely the experiences each participant shared in this activity reflected the experiences they had shared with me in their individual interviews.

Figure 4: Focus group data gathering, activity one



Activity two involved participants placing their lived experiences into interactive spheres which I had represented as three interconnecting circles in a Venn Diagram. The purpose was to elicit the understandings of the participants (for example, see Figure 5 below) of the three categories to emerge from my data analysis at that point: performing agency, making connections and developing knowledges. It was really clear from the data that these three categories were intertwined with each other and it had not yet emerged from the data analyses exactly how the participants viewed this relationship. The purpose of this second activity was a) for the focus group participants to deepen my understanding of their experience of the relationships across and between the categories and b) to explore the processes involved in that, which I had coded “staging grounds”.

Figure 5: Focus group data gathering, activity two



The activity highlighted that the conceptualisation of agency, connection and knowledges as the main categories within a relationship of intersphere interaction was highly problematic. It did not make sense to many of the participants and a rich discussion ensued between participants about the processes of their lived experiences as activists and how they understood the relationships between performing agency, making connections and developing knowledges. Through further use of the constant comparative method, it became clear that the categories of performing agency, making connections and developing knowledges were indeed all properties of the processes of storying the past, navigating the present and imagining the future. These processes are the core conceptual categories of this thesis.

The third activity involved participants discussing the metaphor of *social justice horizons*. The metaphor had emerged from the constant comparative process and it was developing into the substantive theory of the study – it was an explanation of the participants’ driving motivations in their social action. The focus group members liked this metaphor and again, rich data was produced to interrogate the properties of these horizons and what social

justice meant to them. The section below on theory generation deals with this in more depth.

Following the focus group meeting, I called two other participants who expressed interest in continuing to be involved and asked for their thoughts about the ideas that had been raised in the focus group. All of this data collected was then analysed through the constant comparative method, memo-writing and diagramming. I then interviewed one final participant. As the interview was taking place, it was clear to me that saturation had been reached and I did not need to gather further data. Analysis of that interview transcript confirmed this feeling.

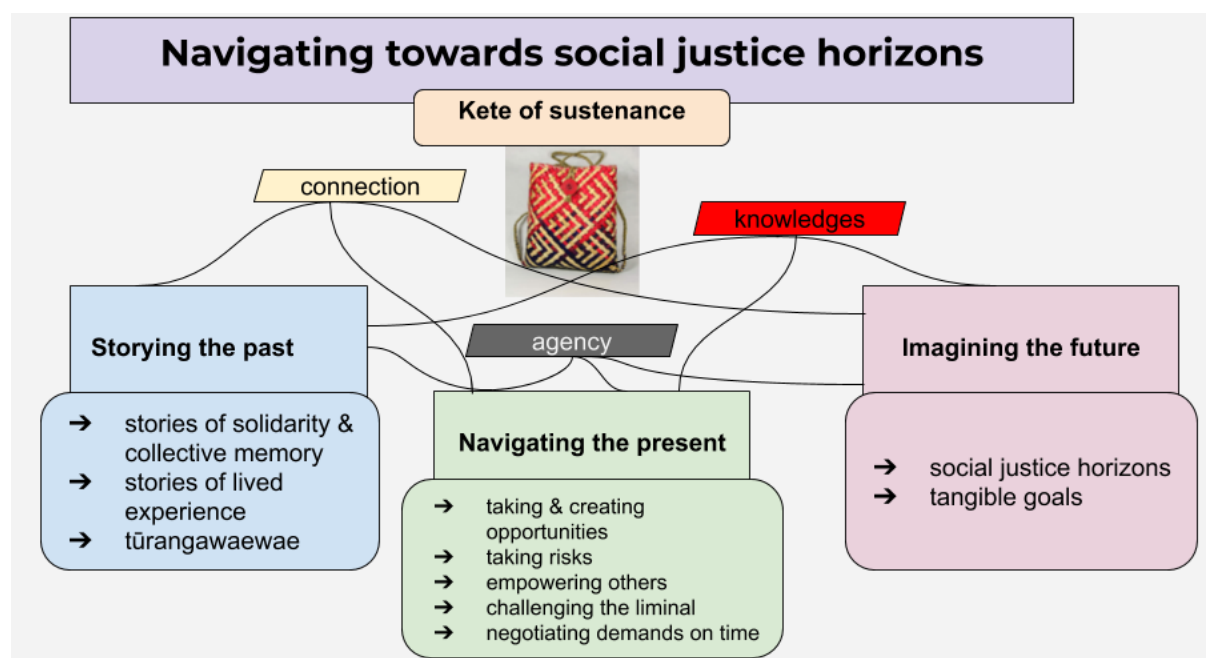
### ***Theory generation***

In this part of the process, I grouped the most significant categories together to develop broader concepts that led to theory generation. Analysis of the additional data from theoretical sampling (the focus group and subsequent intensive interview with the new participant) enabled me to lift extant categories to building substantive theory grounded in the data. During this process, I was looking to create a more coherent understanding of how and why young people were taking social action in their communities. The three major data derived concepts to emerge from the constant comparative process in this study were “storying the past”, “navigating the present” and “imagining the future”. They subsume multiple categories and focused codes and account for the complex and simultaneous processes of the young activists’ lived experiences and their understandings of those processes. These concepts provide a critical perspective for educators and organisations working with young people.

As already noted, grounded theory is an iterative research strategy rather than a linear process. It is fluid and flexible and responsive to the data throughout. Generating grounded theory from the major concepts involved extensive memo writing, diagramming and discussions with various people. Returning to the various forms of memos that I developed, an example of one of these diagrams that I have refined throughout this iterative process is below in Figure 6. It shows the main properties of each concept, the relationships between the concepts and their essential role in the processes of the young activists’ navigation

towards their social justice horizons. The role of the categories having and performing agency, connecting with people, places and times, and gaining and sharing knowledges emerged as central to the identities of the young activists. During this theory generation I came to visualise agency, connection and knowledges as the strands woven to form a *kete* (basket) that sustains and nourishes the young activists on their journey. These two powerful metaphors form the core of the grounded theory of this study. This model in Figure 6 guides the presentation of the findings of this study in Chapter 5.

Figure 6: The concepts and properties of navigating towards social justice horizons



### Part III – Research considerations and an ethics in practice

Part three of this chapter provides an overview of the important decisions I made in the planning and carrying out of this research project and how these decisions constitute an ethics in practice. I begin with a description of the recruitment methods I employed then outline the data collection methods and the limitations of the study. In this part of the chapter I also discuss reflexivity as an important feature of grounded theory methodology and an integral part of the ethical foundations and practices of this study.

#### Recruiting participants

My intention was to develop a substantive theory that looks to explain how and why young people take social action in their communities. To do so, I sought a small number of

participants from diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status and sexuality. Likewise, I was looking for participants engaged in social action in a variety of social issues or concerns.

To be considered for the study, participants needed to be New Zealand residents aged between 16 and 30. They had to identify as someone who takes action for social change in Aotearoa New Zealand and/or are recognised by others as someone who actively works towards social change in their community. In recognition that participants may feel that they are “not *active enough* to qualify as activists” (Manning, 2010, p.5, original emphasis), when recruiting participants, I carefully worded the advertisement as an appeal for young people who “take social action” rather than “youth activists”. The fact that these representations and messages around the term activism found in the literature also emerge from the data in my study in New Zealand is very interesting and provides rich discussion points in Chapter 6.

Participants received information about the research by a social media post on Facebook pages that had youth members and/or deal with youth issues (e.g. community groups, issue based groups, identity based groups, faith based groups, politically based groups, youth groups). I shared the call for participants with 33 groups between the fifth and seventh of May 2016 (see Appendix A). Further information and responses to any questions were provided in a way that suited the participant – usually by email, text message or Facebook Messenger. Snowballing sampling, where one participant suggests another participant, was also used. In addition, adults who are involved with youth organisations recommended the study to young activists they know.

Participants were asked to contact me directly if they wished to be part of the study. Within ten days I had emailed Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix B) to nine interested young people. Six of those first nine respondents went on to be part of the study. Once data collection and data analysis had begun, I sought further participants, usually through snowballing sampling, in order to carry out theoretical sampling. As data was coded and categories emerged, I gained more of an understanding of the developing theory and used this to decide what data to collect next, and where to find them as the data suggested it to be necessary (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b). This also led me to turn down a small number of



people who had expressed an interest in participating in the study. Decisions about who got an invitation to participate and who would not be invited required ethical practices to be put into place. These are outlined later in this chapter.

In total, the study had 13 participants aged between 16 and 29. The first twelve interviews took place over a period of eight months between May 2016 and March 2017. A final interview took place in May 2017 following the focus group discussion so that I could check findings. Once I had interviewed the thirteenth participant and completed analysis of the transcript, it was clear to me that my categories had reached saturation. I did not need to recruit any further participants or collect further data from existing participants.

### **Data Collection**

As per grounded theory methods, data for the study was collected concurrently with the data analysis process. I first conducted in-depth interviews of about an hour in length. These were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were also invited to participate in the framing of research design and data collection if they wished. They also could choose to be named if they desired to gain recognition and maintain ownership of the contributions made to the study. The literature on youth research supports such an approach (Brooks, 2013). The fact that the majority of the participants wanted to be named and recognisable in this study, reinforces this finding in the literature. The majority of the first twelve participants also expressed an interest in meeting with other participants in the study. Ultimately, eight participants were able to come together for a focus group which gave me feedback about the analysis I had carried out up until that point, and set the direction for further theoretical sampling. In these ways, the project aimed to be *with* young people rather than *about* young people. The focus group process is described in detail in the theoretical sampling section above.

### **Conducting the interviews**

My data collection began with an introductory meeting and semi-structured interview, audio recorded, where participants were invited to speak about themselves, their involvement in their communities and thoughts about social justice (see Appendix E for a list of guiding questions). I was aware of the importance of establishing rapport (McMillan,

2008) as how the participants viewed me would influence what they shared with me (Charmaz, 2014). I was also aware that identity and etiquette are issues for the researcher when interacting with participants. For this reason, the participants were invited to choose the meeting place, and were able to tell me the days and times that suited them best from the days that I was available. I travelled to several different cities in New Zealand to meet with the participants in person. In other words, we worked together to find what worked for both of us. Most of that communication was carried out via email or text message so that there was a written record of the planning. I thought this important for the participants as well as for myself. I made an effort to keep my language precise but simple, using colloquial phrases and non-academic language so as to appear as down-to-earth and approachable as possible. I also made it clear that I valued the time of the participants and gave each a koha of \$20 in vouchers of their preference. This was a very small token, but one met with appreciation.

Typically, I met with each participant for just over an hour. Interviews began with an invitation to tell me about their life background and how they got involved in taking social action. As I was interested in the young people's understandings of their own identity, I allowed them to speak until they naturally came to a pause before asking questions to gain deeper insights or richer descriptions. My list of possible questions served more as a reminder for me as the interview went on of the possible themes I wished to gain their understandings and experiences of, rather than a question list that I adhered to in any structured way. Charmaz (2006) argues that "grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended but directed, shaped yet elegant, and paced yet flexible approaches" (p.29). Intensive interviewing means that the researcher is looking for in-depth interpretations and understandings of a topic or experience from the participant. Such an approach requires listening and observing, prompting, probing and following-up with sensitivity to elicit each participant's interpretation of his or her experience (Charmaz, 2006). It also means that interview questions are revised and developed as data collection progresses. As Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) note, "grounded theorists combine data analysis with data collection by simultaneously attending to the questions they ask and the answers they receive" (p.9).

The open-ended style of the questioning resulted in most participants giving me long, detailed descriptions of the people, places, events, values, ideas and actions that are significant to them and their lived experiences. My questioning was responsive to each individual participant's story while also guiding them towards deeper explanations of their understandings and experiences of certain ideas, firstly from the literature, and then from the data as focused codes and categories emerged from the process of constant comparative data analysis. My role was to tap into the implicit meanings and tacit knowledge of my participants (Charmaz, 2006).

At the end of each interview, I also elicited the participant's ideas about how the study might proceed, in terms of individual or group participation, and what that might look like. Most of the participants expressed interest in being involved further, and most stated that they would like to meet with other young people involved in the study. These responses led to the design of the focus group for theoretical sampling in the grounded theory process.

Each participant's contributions were transcribed immediately (by myself or a hired transcriber) and analysed separately in initial line-by-line coding. I sent the completed transcribed interview to each participant for checking, and upon receiving approval that the transcript was accurate I began initial coding. For one participant, I followed up by email and a phone conversation to allow that participant to articulate his experiences in more detail as the way in which the transcribed interview read did not fully convey the meaning he thought significant. Following completion of my initial coding, I also emailed each participant a scanned copy of the overview diagram I created to capture the essence of their interpretations of their experiences. Participants who responded to these emails were generally pleased and sometimes enthusiastic about seeing their views and experiences in this distilled format.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is extremely important for me as a critical social researcher and for the use of constructivist grounded theory. I am aware of the assumptions and perspectives that I have brought to the project, and how and to what extent I have drawn upon these during this process. I have been willing to revise or relinquish my assumptions and perspectives, should

my interpretations of the data so indicate (Charmaz, 2014). My views and definitions of social action and conceptualisations of social justice (from the literature and experience working with young people in community and service projects for over a decade) have determined my framing of the project. For example, I saw a need to explore this and assumed that young people would want to be involved. As noted earlier, I entered into this study with an awareness that I did not impose my understandings on the participants, especially as I sought their understandings, and offered them the opportunity to contribute to the design of the study in the second phase. I am aware that this was also an assumption that I made – that a participatory approach would be met with excitement and keen interest. The reality was that while most did have interest in participating further, in various different ways, these young people mentioned the lack of time to be able to take part in many of the ways that they expressed an interest in being involved in.

Avoiding preconceptions when coding is important to the integrity of the grounded theory process. The theory emerges from the data. This is particularly important to keep in mind when undertaking grounded theory in a doctoral study setting: the requirement of the doctoral process to produce a proposal consisting of a literature review does pose a real challenge to the researcher's ability to avoid preconceptions. This is why reflexivity is such an integral part of the grounded theory methodology. I had a particular experience with needing to let go of preconceptions from my literature review. This was brought to light in the theoretical sampling stage of my study when I presented emergent findings back to eight participants who came together for a focus group. I had latched on to the concept of "staging grounds" from my literature review and presented the emerging findings to the focus group to see if this idea of staging grounds resonated with their understanding of their experiences. While the group largely agreed with the three significant categories that emerged (knowledge, connection, agency) they did not identify these as part of a staging ground and did not understand how the activity that I designed during the focus group was useful in explaining their experiences. I had tried to make a theoretical concept from the literature fit as a theoretical concept in my study when it did not emerge from the data. This was an important realisation in the process of this study. Following the focus group, I was able to take the new data from the participants' rich discussions of the emergent categories and their understandings of their experiences and develop theoretical categories

that resulted in building the substantive theory of how young activists navigate towards social justice horizons through storytelling.

### **Ethical considerations**

There were a number of ethical considerations that I needed to take into account as I set out to undertake this study and as I put the research into practice with my participants. Firstly, I followed the guidelines of the University of Auckland Human Participant's Ethics Committee. The ethics application form highlights a number of key ethical concerns including informed consent, confidentiality, the use of data and cultural issues. My methodological choices have been driven by my desire to have young social activists' voices heard. This means I made a conscious decision to acknowledge their agency and capabilities. Formal ethics guidelines and procedures have been shown to limit young people's agency and emphasise the researcher and research institution's power over knowledge construction (Brooks, 2013; Grinyer, 2002; Wood & Kidman, 2013). I was aware of these ethical issues and tried to allow for as much as agency while still aiming to limit harm that may come from being in the study.

### **Confidentiality**

As I have noted in the previous sections, I did not make the assumption that participants would want to conceal their identity. Instead, I took the approach that participants have the right to retain ownership of their contributions and therefore can choose to be known or not. The majority of the participants were comfortable with (and desire/already have) public recognition of the social action they are involved in and wanted to have their words and ideas attributed to them in publications that come from this study. They gave informed and voluntary consent to be a part of the study. The identity of the participant who wished to remain confidential has been concealed by using a pseudonym of their choosing. No data which could be used to identify this participant will be published unless they have given their consent. Given the significance of context in this study – the spatial, cultural, relational contexts – ethical considerations needed to be responsive to the participants and their communities. I made sure to have ongoing dialogue with participants around such issues as confidentiality – especially if they wanted to take part in the focus group interview.

### ***Use of data***

The participants were offered the option of a) retaining their original recordings or b) having their recordings destroyed. Participants were also offered the final version of their interview transcript for their personal archives. The written transcripts (stored for 6 years) and consent forms (stored for 6 years) will be shredded and discarded after the storage time has ended.

A copy of previous transcripts were provided in any follow-up meetings and participants were given the opportunity to review and edit these as desired. One participant asked me to make changes to their transcript. Emergent codes and categories were also shared with participants, and they were invited to comment on these and take part in analysis of their transcript if they wished to. I also sent participants the “found poem” I created as a way to introduce them in the thesis and gave them the opportunity to edit the poem or make suggestions as to how I might edit it. One participant asked me to edit their poem.

Participants knew that they could decline further involvement in the study at any stage but in the event that they did withdraw, I maintained access to any information contributed at least two weeks prior to this decision. I did not have any participants withdraw, though one participant chose not to respond to any follow up communications about the transcript and summary of initial coding. A few participants have continued to be in contact with me well beyond the data collection and analysis phases of the study. I believe that the findings of this study will be of interest to the communities of the participants, and I have contacted participants for their input about ways to share findings with their wider communities.

### ***Cultural issues***

The onus is on me as the researcher to be mindful of cultural dimensions when interacting with all participants. This is based on the right of all participants to be treated with dignity and respect. A starting point to any kind of cultural competence is for the researcher to be aware of their own cultural location, as our “personal biographies” (Mutch, 2013b) will affect our positioning within the research. I am a 41 year-old fifth generation New Zealander who identifies as Pākehā, and the particularities of my background have influenced the vantage point from which I have engaged in this research. I have made this explicit in the thesis and to participants. It is important that any research undertaken is sensitive to the cultural practices of all ethnicities and groups with a shared sense of identity, such as people

of minority sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics. I ensured cultural sensitivity through ongoing discussions between myself and the participants.

### ***Criteria for inclusion***

I considered how I would respond if I got more expressions of interest from young people than I needed in the study. I replied to every person who made contact with me and made it clear that I was looking for a diverse range of young people, and that I may not need everyone who responds to the advertisement. I explained that the decision was not personal and not being selected is not a judgement of the person's commitment to their social action. I had email exchanges with three people who showed interest in the study but were not invited to participate.

In sum, ethical considerations needed to be discussed and reflected upon throughout the process. These became an integral part of my reflexive practice as I undertook this grounded theory study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined how I maintained epistemic, theoretical, methodological and ethical commitments throughout this study. Through presenting a social constructionist lens that informs the data and Freire's ideas of conscientisation, praxis, dialogical education, critical hope and radical democracy, I effectively outline the foundations for social action and the associated politics that can either hinder or instil it. This framework worked well with a constructivist grounded theory approach which allowed me to concurrently analyse and collect data to ultimately ensure that participant experiences were grounded in the ensuing theory generation. From initial coding, focused codes emerged, and following further iterative phases of data collection, and data analysis, I developed categories from the most significant focused codes. The process was to then elevate these categories, after theoretical sampling, to concepts that build the framework to generate a grounded theory. I used memo-writing and diagramming extensively throughout this iterative process. These processes allowed me to appropriately elevate the analytic rendering of the data to ensure that this was not premature and was grounded in the participants' experiences. Through discussing reflexivity across the three sections, I have located myself across all aspects of

the study to emphasise that I do not sit above or outside it. Rather, this has helped me to remain accountable and reflexive to the ensuing analysis, processes around recruitment and an ethics in practice. Now that I have outlined these various components of my study design, the following chapters introduce my participants and how their rich narratives and interactions provided the building blocks to establish the various ways that young people navigate towards social justice horizons.



## Chapter 4 – Introducing the participants

In this chapter I introduce the young people who participated in the study by using their words to create found poetry which is “participant-voiced” (Prendergast, 2004, p.74). Found poetry is a recognised and established practice in literature whereby existing text is taken and reshaped and reordered into poems (Patrick, 2016). Research found poetry is a tool used to represent the lived experiences of study participants by taking the words from the qualitative data, usually an interview, and reordering them into poetic form (Patrick, 2016). As I was engaging with the data to begin writing up the findings, I felt that I needed to capture the essence of each participant and their lived experience without my voice intruding. I wanted a way for the participants to be introduced as fully as themselves while also signposting some of the significant themes to emerge from the study as a whole. My decade of teaching English literature and poetry and sporadically writing poems myself, including found poems, convinced me that crafting “participant-voiced” research found poems would be powerful. In addition, the process of creating the found poems became a further tool of data analyses in the constant comparative method described in the previous chapter.

Of course, my voice cannot fully recede as I have edited the interviews and focus group data and selected the words that I believe to represent the participant and their journey faithfully. I have deliberately crafted each found poem to sound like a monologue, as if the participant is speaking to an audience, sharing their values and experiences in an intimate space like a small town hall or local community theatre. I gave each participant the opportunity to give me feedback on their monologue in draft form, inviting them to shape the way in which they are introduced to the readers of this thesis. I have made a particular effort to capture the personality and character of these young people in this chapter – my commitment is to giving them space to be heard and be valued for who they are without interruption.

The monologues appear in the order in which the participants were interviewed, starting in May 2016 and concluding in April 2017. Eight of the participants joined a focus group session in Auckland in April 2017 and that data has also been used in crafting these

introductory pieces, as have any other exchanges such as emails and phone calls made during the data gathering and iterative analysis processes. As noted, the participants each had opportunities to review and edit their own found poem.

The found poem monologues are followed immediately by the findings chapter.

## Henare

I'm part of the East Coast Hemp Organisation.  
Our main goal is to push sustainable materials into the building industry.

I probably grew up no different to a lot of people in a Māori situation:  
raised by a single mother  
had an older brother (and probably multiple step brothers and step sisters)  
growing up in state housing  
Cannons' Creek  
Flaxmere  
I understood the lifestyle

My original drive was the state of housing in New Zealand.  
With my background in the construction industry  
as well as state housing, growing up,  
I guess I had the perspective of how to sort of  
put something together: I knew  
both sides of the story.  
You look at your own cousins and know that  
they're probably never  
gonna be able to afford  
a house.

That's the truth of it.

The truth of it really struck me,  
scared me.  
You need that tūrangawaewae,  
that place to stand.

So, I googled sustainable building materials and  
hemp came up.  
I thought, well I might be able to do this  
I've always been a bit of an optimist  
I'll give it a shot  
I'm a risk-taker – it gives me a good sense of  
confidence  
I can accept that making mistakes is part of  
the process  
but it's not going to  
slow me down

My tikanga is about social outcomes  
we're just trying to do our part  
in a war against greed

Our biggest strength is that way that we  
connect to people and  
find connection.  
It's that whole philosophy around hongyi, you know –  
for the minute you're there  
you're equal  
sharing the same breath.  
We share breaths.

## Connor

I grew up in Fiji in a privileged position  
of wealth compared  
to the people I was living around.  
When I was about ten  
I went from that life  
to being quite poor.  
In high school I spent months  
living on a friend's couch;  
seeing more sides of the story really helped me,  
made me feel more compelled  
for social justice.

I was shocked  
when I came to live in New Zealand –  
put into tackle rugby and really  
pro-masculine things.  
Not bullied, but  
separated.  
I didn't fit into  
this heteronormative lifestyle.  
My school in a tiny town  
was a really nice place  
for people who weren't like me.

The first time in my life I'd heard  
myself talked about positively  
had a really profound affect on me: Tabby saying,  
"If you're queer, that's perfectly ok."  
I loved having a safe space  
being free to be.

To be safe. That's the first step.

Acknowledging the power of proper education  
what we can do to change ourselves to be more loving and accepting  
advancing youth perspectives  
sharing personal stories -  
negative experiences as well as some positive ones.  
I am an activist through education  
and telling stories -  
an activist with social anxiety.

I cared so much I couldn't help but do it.  
Seeing it work – it's food for the soul.

## Tabby

My story sort of started when  
I was a teenager  
at Marlborough Girls.  
It wasn't a safe place  
to be exploring your identity.

My family moved –  
Suffolk, Tauranga, Blenheim then Nelson.  
I happened to go to Nayland College,  
the first school  
in Australasia Pacific to have  
a Queer Straight Alliance.  
I went along  
more to support friends really.  
Being in that space,  
seeing others  
confident and comfortable  
in themselves and their identity.  
Being open,  
knowing that school was  
accepting our diversity  
saying *this is ok*  
*there's a space for you.*  
That was really empowering.

When the previous leaders left the school,  
someone needed to step in.  
I became the student leader –  
it kind of just happened,  
going to all the meetings  
getting passionate about what we were going to do.  
Being in a really freeing space  
with a group of people who were willing to change things.

I'm passionate about  
empowering young queer and trans people to  
take action  
find their own community  
know they're ok.  
People who are  
struggling with their identity  
receiving discrimination  
have to have  
some way to feel

safe and  
stay alive and  
thrive.

To reach that vision the rest of society have to step up  
to embrace  
people like us.

## Mike

I am someone who wants to see change.

Sometimes the really big top people  
they don't really listen to me –  
I guess they think  
this person with a learning disability  
doesn't know what he's talking about  
but I sorta do know  
what I'm talking about.  
I guess, at times, the top people know  
what the people want.  
And sometimes they don't  
know.  
They think they know.  
And just talking quite firmly to them,  
they tend to listen.  
I always say if you want something  
done right  
just talk to the people.

I'm from a hard little place but  
everyone is so friendly.  
My family are very strong.  
They're very very strong.

I wear many hats, representing groups,  
bringing people with disability  
to be  
to do  
what they want  
in the community.  
I am someone who wants  
to see change:

More people with disabilities on the youth council.  
The minimum wage exemption permit needs to go.  
People need to vote, it's important to get the right councillors.

I don't think there should be  
special education schools.  
They're soul destroying.  
I visited one,  
almost broke down in tears -  
it felt like we'd gone back into that  
institute phase



again.

Everyone, if they can, should be  
at their local school

but a lot of schools turn them  
away –

don't have the resources to cope.

Well they should.

We're in 2016.

Come on now!

## Adam

I came from a family of committed trade unionists.  
When I was 16  
I was invited along to a showing of  
*An Inconvenient Truth*.  
That really impressed upon me the  
criticality of what's going on:  
We can't have social justice and peace  
without environmental justice.  
We can't have environmental justice  
without social justice and peace.  
These things are different aspects  
of the same kaupapa.

My whole life - who I am,  
what I enjoy doing - is  
to seek peace, find the place for  
people to be able to express their  
inner-most beings and passions.  
Find that space where they can say  
those things that need to be said  
to try to ease the communicative barriers;  
find acceptance around the room;  
finding that shared kaupapa.  
A foundation  
for all of us to build upon.  
Move towards that shared goal:  
city, nature, society  
    resilient, inclusive, vibrant  
    People flourishing  
    Land flourishing.  
I'm something of a systems analyst  
in a way.  
I see  
interlocking  
interweaving systems of  
water, materials, energy and people –  
all the ways those things interact with one another.

*Ko au te awa,*  
*ko awa te au*  
I am the river and  
the river is me –  
it's a deep understanding  
between the inextricable link

between  
yourself and the land.

## Molly

The Steiner school is a huge part of who I am –  
the focus on well-balanced  
children, adults, people  
rather than academics.  
My parents, their philosophies –  
being really respectful  
of everything and everyone and myself.  
My mother is an incredible  
teacher of self-healing  
and self-loving:  
you can't give from an empty vessel  
she was learning as we were growing up.  
Being privy to her transition  
really opened my eyes.

When I learnt about injustice  
at a Treaty workshop  
I was just so angry –  
like the light had been  
stolen a little bit  
from everything I saw  
I felt so stupid  
so guilty  
this amazing woman told me  
*once you're privy to  
the truth  
it's a responsibility.  
Don't take on that guilt.*  
That was the moment!  
I'm not stopping -  
I need to get to the bottom of this:  
"Activism is the rent I pay for  
living on this planet"

People of privilege need to  
step back  
stop trying to control  
everything  
to save everything.  
The privileged, like myself  
have a responsibility to  
work with one another  
raising awareness, gently, respectfully  
acknowledging the past

acknowledging the systems and structures  
that privilege them and  
marginalize others.  
If we focus on more on evolving  
our collective conscience  
of humanity and  
detach from consumerism and  
convenience – that competitive growth mentality  
redefine our purpose  
in being here  
that would be  
my  
ideal  
society.

## Nishhza

I've always been passionate about something:  
I did animal rights in high school  
I was a vegetarian  
I got a job with Greenpeace  
went from animals rights to climate change.  
I was really into politics.  
The Sri Lankan war ended in 2009  
there was a massacre  
a lot of atrocities committed  
I became really interested  
because it's my history as well.

I moved here from Malaysia  
when I was 14. We were the only  
non-Pākehā family  
in the area.  
Our neighbours were friendly enough  
but they warned us  
about Māori people  
and Pacific Islanders  
and South Auckland.  
It was common discourse that Māori  
get too much.  
My family absorbed these  
anti-Māori sentiments –  
as have other South Asian  
immigrant communities.  
We benefit from anti-Māori racism:  
it's like a racial hierarchy  
those in power have created.  
We maintain it by  
distancing ourselves from it;  
we buy into the whole narrative  
because we're like:  
*at least we're not them.*

My awareness of race issues grew  
when I was out in the world:  
I experienced racism myself  
but I recognised my privileges –  
being educated and well spoken  
protects me from experiencing  
the worst of racism

Amnesty International's campaign to end capital punishment

Oxfam's lobbying against climate change:  
My entry into human rights and social justice.

I'm passionate about working with young people and showing them healing is possible, experiencing injustice is wrong.

Empowering them – providing a platform for strong solidarity between the migrant community tangata whenua and the Pacific Island community.

That's my kaupapa.

## **Anya**

My family is involved in environmental justice  
social justice  
I've grown up with those values:  
treating everyone with respect  
making a sustainable future.

I'm very very privileged  
how many things I've got to do  
I grew up in a well-educated household  
I don't worry about if I have  
food on my plate  
And the obvious privilege of  
being a cis white woman

High school really wasn't the place for me.  
You spend all your time  
working on assessments rather than  
learning  
I'm leaving school  
cos it's not growing me  
as a citizen  
by testing me lots  
So I'm  
dropping out  
taking an alternative education  
gap year

My best friend Eva has terminal cancer.  
She shows me  
that you don't need to grow up  
before you make a difference.  
She is already making a massive difference.

Being able to communicate your passion  
is the main thing.  
Communicate your passion  
Educate people about the issue  
get them hooked  
Empower them  
to make a difference  
Connect with  
like-minded people  
then  
activate.



## Tim

Talofa.

I am Samoan. Community participation and political participation are ingrained in the Samoan or Tongan way of life. The youth, their entire lives are framed around social roles and responsibilities and how they can contribute to the village and how the village contributes to the broader national picture.

My dad is a chief in his village, very much concerned about what was going on at home and in the region. We have maintained those connections since we moved here. My commitment came originally from my dad. He is the most committed person I know. This responsibility was given to him from his dad. It's really important that we maintain that connection. My involvement in the advocacy for underrepresented groups and marginalised groups evolved from that.

Mentoring relationships are really important. At university Carmel took me under her wing pushed me to do my masters – really pushed me to succeed. I was blown away listening to the work and the advocacy of leaders in Pacific education in this country. Meeting people, working here too, I have been so fortunate.

There's a real need to redefine leadership and make connections through social media. I promote stories –

get awareness out there.  
It's really powerful, social media.

It's so important to vote. A lot people  
don't understand and  
appreciate how important it is.  
It's important to reach out and have  
a conversation about it  
so they start to realise, make connections:  
it affects your parents, your family.

It always comes back to how we distribute  
and redistribute resources  
in the world.  
Social justice is about making sure  
everyone has the basics.

## Rose

It was my grandmother on my mother's side who really inspired me.  
She passed away when I was 9 or 10  
her relationship with activism  
her involvement with Amnesty International and political organisations  
inspired me in my teenage years  
to think about how I really wanted to  
be involved in social change.

It was a long conversation with a family friend of a friend:  
geopolitics, oil, working with Doctors Without Borders –  
a tipping point conversation.  
*We need more people  
actively on the ground  
involved.*

An Amnesty International group started at my high school,  
I had this connection with my grandmother.  
I went to all the meetings  
really believed in all their work but there was also this  
beautiful man running the group.  
I was smitten.  
That helped motivate that connection a little bit as well;  
I took over running it after he left school.

I tried to bring empowerment into my high school environment  
to organize a big public event.  
No room for discussion.  
Administration weren't willing to get behind –  
or at least get out of the way  
of what we were trying to achieve.

I learnt sometimes the easiest  
way to get things done is  
to do it yourself  
without the support of structures  
that already exist.

What we need is a cultural shift  
away from intensive capitalism.

People need to engage  
with the discourses  
happening around this.  
Creating instead of fighting.

Engaging with the discourses  
as well as trying to  
advance them.

Tell stories that will inspire  
people to make social change happen,  
to engage with it,  
understand it better.

Documentary making: a vehicle for finding the most urgent stories  
stories about  
social change.

I want to challenge the narrative  
that democracy is fucked because  
young people aren't engaged –  
it's so grotesquely unfair.

## Charlizza

A lot of what I do comes from  
my mum.  
She was a social worker  
we always had young people  
in our home  
seeing the change that she made with them  
was just so awesome  
to have impacted someone else's life  
I one day dreamt about doing that  
for other young people.

I've got a passion for youth development  
social issues that affect  
Māori and Pasifika:  
youth suicide  
homelessness  
teen parenting  
family violence.

Working through performing arts  
we give them a platform  
to say something  
but don't just hand them a microphone –  
we workshop, discuss these issues  
in groups and one on one.  
It sparks something;  
they can figure out  
what it is they want to say  
so when they are given the opportunity  
to get on stage  
they have something to say.

My dad took his life  
when I was young;  
you know when you've lost someone  
you get this overwhelming feeling  
like  
*I've gotta do something*  
you know?  
I am going to do what I can do –  
I know what we are doing is  
high risk  
but it's even higher risk to  
not do anything.

We need to talk about it;  
not be afraid to talk about it.  
Suicide is not this  
real tapu topic anymore.  
We know what we are doing is  
making a difference:  
we use the arts to communicate,  
we are changing lives.  
It's not about fixing young people  
but giving them the  
tools and skills  
to be able to  
fix themselves.

## Josh

I advocate for LGBT rights  
for youth especially.  
But also poverty  
and racism.  
My biggest strength is that  
I can talk a lot about things  
and make sure that  
people listen –  
really making sure  
people have a voice  
even if they can't afford to  
or don't have the technology to.  
I think that you should use the  
privilege that you have  
to educate people on  
what it's like to  
not have privilege.  
Combatting my own racism  
has come from seeing stuff on  
social media –  
seeing police shooting random  
black people  
seeing riots.  
I don't want to be that person  
who goes through life  
pretending that I don't know  
my white privilege.

I grew up with four brothers  
and a single mum;  
it was a loud household  
and I had a little bit of a rough  
upbringing  
but I've grown to be  
a leader  
I kinda just stood up  
and kept trying.  
I like to be a leader.  
The purpose of leadership  
is not to create more followers  
but to create more leaders –  
showing them that they can  
do what they think is right.

I want to be able to leave the school  
better off than when I went in:  
A safer space, more accepting  
for LGBT students specifically.  
I came out in year 10 and  
started the Queer Straight Alliance at my school.  
In year 11 I was the anti-harassment leader  
Year 12, the student council meeting leader  
Year 13, head boy.  
It's definitely progressed.  
Once you start a conversation it's  
hard to ignore it  
it's hard to be ignorant of it,  
ignorance isn't bliss.  
I think people need to realise that  
everyone's different.  
We need more safe spaces for  
young people in the LGBT community  
in Hamilton:  
more opportunities for them to  
meet up, have a friendship network.



## Joshua

I feel like I've been groomed  
to be involved with issues and things  
I feel strongly passionate about.  
Went to my first protest  
when I was 11,  
been a little activist ever since I was  
in primary school.  
What I fought for when I was 11,  
I'm still really passionate about.  
They weren't things that were  
trivial to me,  
but real issues:  
a lot of students couldn't afford  
uniforms or text books.  
Our class wanted to fix that.  
We went to different companies  
asked them to sponsor our uniform.  
That's the first time I  
made a documentary,  
and saw my documentary changing lives.  
That's when I fell in love with film making.

Everything that I did, I felt  
supported  
and empowered  
by my parents, my family, my school.  
It's my mentors that really  
shape the type of leader  
I've become.  
I've been given this privilege and platform  
I need to voice the opinions of those  
who are unable to.

In my high school  
all the students were streamed by  
academic performance  
so you had the smart students  
in the accelerated class, A stream  
the average students, B stream  
the not so average, C stream  
all of my people –  
Pasifika, Māori –  
were in C stream.  
I was the only one in A stream.

That made me fight  
even harder:  
there was a duty in me that had to be  
fulfilled –  
it wasn't about me  
but who I represented.  
I really needed to show my best  
and I took every opportunity;  
my assessments were a way for me  
to beat the stereotype  
one  
assessment  
at a time.

Pacific people are amazing;  
the narrative needs to change.  
See us as the amazing voyagers and  
navigators that we  
once were.  
We need to empower ourselves  
because we're fed a lot of  
disempowering messages.

The remainder of the thesis engages with the self-understandings of the lived experiences of the 13 young people introduced in these found poems. In this chapter, I have selected and arranged key ideas and messages for each participant so that it is possible to gain a tiny snapshot of the complex and intersectional social issues that are important to each person, how they came be involved in working to change those issues and what they want for the future. The themes of past, present and future are evident in these found poems and are used as the organising structure of the findings chapter that follows.

## Chapter 5 – Navigating towards social justice horizons, weaving *kete* of sustenance

This chapter presents the key findings from the constant comparative analysis of the 13 participant interviews and the focus group discussion between eight of those participants. It highlights how the young people understand the processes and contexts of being and becoming young social activists. At the heart of the chapter are the two metaphors that are central to the way in which I conceptualise their being and becoming: young people as navigators and *kete* as sustenance. It struck me as I iteratively engaged with the young peoples' definitions and experiences of activism that they are actively navigating a course, making choices about how to take action but also how they portray themselves as they are carrying out the work they are doing. This image of the young person as a navigator resonated with many other elements emerging from the data and became the metaphor I decided to use in constructing this findings chapter. This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the metaphor of young person as navigator, outlining the nature of the participants' journeys towards their social justice horizons. I also introduce the metaphor of the *kete* (basket) that the participants simultaneously weave and carry with them on their journey.

The remainder of the chapter is structured in three interrelated and interdependent parts, each presenting simultaneously the participants' self-understandings of social action, the contexts in which social action takes place and the processes of activism to emerge from the lived experiences of the participants:

- storying the past
- navigating the present and
- imagining the future.

I present these findings as part of a larger holistic finding chapter to highlight the interrelated and interdependent nature of these processes in the young activists' navigation towards social justice horizons. To separate them as distinct findings chapters of their own creates an artificial impression that each process is able to occur independently of the others. This is not the experience of the participants.

Before presenting the three parts as outlined above, I introduce the navigator and *kete* metaphors that are central to my conceptualisation of the participants' journeys throughout the remainder of the thesis.

### **Young person as navigator**

As noted in Chapter 1, other studies present the processes of becoming and being as ceaseless and dynamic (Fisher, 2015; Stetsenko, 2009; Wood, 2017). I found that the participants in this study also represent their lived experiences in this way. Rather than identifying a fixed point at which they became an activist or decided to commit to taking social action, the young people spoke of multiple moments of agency which were spurred on by various connections to people, places and issues. They also told stories of gaining new understandings and knowledges in a range of settings and at differing points in their lives.

A few participants refer to their becoming as a journey, linking their identity to travelling a distance, encountering various people, places, ideas, skills and experiences along the way. Adam goes into more depth, acknowledging the physical journeys as well as spiritual journeys he has undertaken in life. He describes a journey as *"anytime you're letting go of your deep sense that you'll know what's going to happen next. So you're letting go of your knowing, I guess"*. In order to get from one point to another, the young activists recognise the necessity of heading into the unknown. I found this metaphor of journeying resonating with the data as I carried out constant comparative analyses. When two subsequent participants spoke of the significance of Pacific peoples as navigators, I looked at the data through this lens more specifically. Seeing the young person as a navigator implies that there is a sense of purpose and direction, and that decisions are made at different points in time and depend on the spatial (time and place), relational and socio-economic contexts in which opportunities present themselves. The lived experiences of the young people in the study indicate that they are on a journey, *"letting go of [their] knowing"* whilst also trusting that they are headed towards something, and that they are indeed active agents in this journey, performing agency in order to navigate their course. They accept that they don't *"know what's going to happen next"* but they have a vision of what they would like that to

be as well as a plan of how they might achieve it. In addition, each young person navigates their journey with their own *kete* (basket) which sustains them as they travel. It also provides direction and guidance as they navigate towards their social justice horizons.

### **Kete as sustenance**

*Nāu te rourou  
Nāku te rourou  
Ka ora ai te iwi*

The basket of skills and experiences that I bring  
And the basket of your skills and experiences  
Will sustain and nurture all of the people<sup>5</sup>

The metaphor of the *kete* allows us to understand how the young people sustain themselves on their journey as they navigate. A *kete* is an object, a traditional Māori woven basket. However, *kete* is also used as a metaphor in te ao Māori: *kete o te wānanga* (baskets of knowledge). I use the image of the *kete* in both its literal and metaphorical meaning in this thesis. Figure 7 below shows the central role of the *kete* in the young activists' experiences.

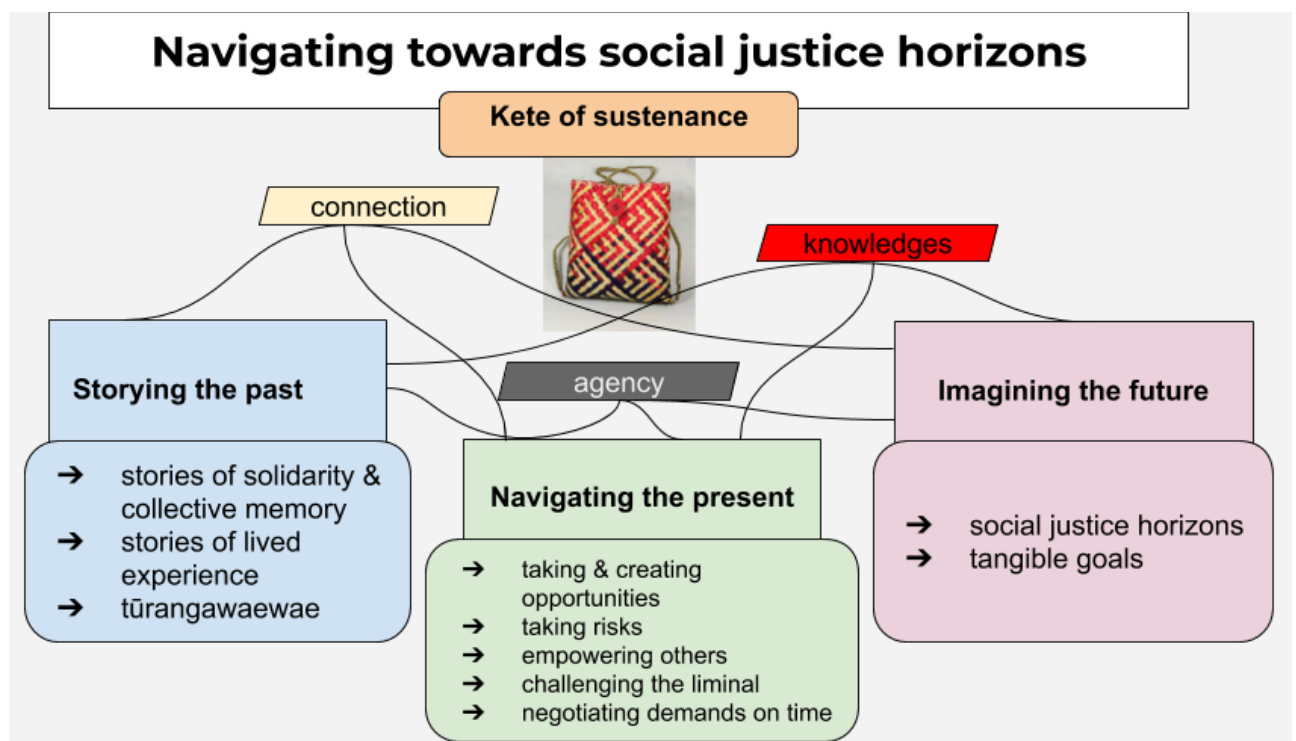
The analysis of the narratives of the young people's experiences revealed that they are comprised of three interconnected and interrelated properties: connection, knowledges and agency. These are interwoven throughout each of the three processes of being and becoming activists (storying, navigating and imagining). Connection refers to the relationships the participants' have with people, places and experiences, particularly issues of social justice. It is to do with belonging and inclusion. Knowledges is the understanding that the participants have and seek to have, as well as the understanding they are working for others to have. The participants stories are full of learning and, at times, unlearning. Agency is the opportunity and ability for decision-making and action-taking that the participants engage in at a personal and collective level. I have visualised these properties as strands woven together to make a *kete* from which the young person can draw upon in any given situation along their journey. The *kete* is a resource that is continually being created,

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<sup>5</sup> A *whakataukī* or traditional Māori proverb

intertwining stories of the past and lived experiences with the possibilities of the future. It is through the weaving of the strands that the participants are able to simultaneously hold, develop and enact their activist identities. The construction processes of that *kete*, as well as the nature of the contents of the *kete* will be described in Part I of this chapter, storying the past. In Part II, navigating the present, I will demonstrate how the participants draw from their *kete* while they also actively shape, re-work and add to it. And in Part III, imagining the future, I will show how the *kete* serves an important function as a place to foster and develop visions of social justice as the young people navigate towards their social justice horizons.

Figure 7\*: A visual summary of the properties and processes of being and becoming an activist



## Part I – Storying the past

*It's important to know yourself, to love yourself. (Henare)*

\* Figure 6 and Figure 7 are the same diagram. Figure 7 has a different label as I have used the diagram in a different way. The same diagram is also repeated as Figure 8 at the end of this Chapter as part of the summary of findings.

Unsurprisingly, and in keeping with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, for many of the participants their passion for social justice is clearly identified as stemming from relational, cultural and spiritual values and experiences. This section describes the importance of participants' storytelling of the past in the weaving of their *kete*. They told stories of how people were influential: grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and a wider whānau (family) culture; as well as people connected to their wider communities of church, school, clubs and other organisations, including relationships built online through social media. Three broad themes emerged from these stories of the past:

- 1) stories of solidarity and collective memory;
- 2) stories of their own past – lived experiences that they remember; and
- 3) the significance of *tūrangawaewae*

Oftentimes the two types of stories are so intertwined, the stories of others becoming such a part of the story of self that the participant seamlessly switches between them; they are all part of a vivid lived experience. The narratives that people tell are important. As Rymes (2001) puts it: "Telling stories is the most universal means human beings have for conveying to others who we are, what we believe, how we feel, what we value, and how we see the world" (p. 163 cited in Souto-Manning, 2014, p.205). It is important to note that for indigenous peoples story telling passes on "both a narrative of history and an attitude about history" which is framed by the lived experiences of imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 1999, p.19).

As I present the findings in this section of the chapter, I have loosely grouped the stories of the participants into these two broad themes (stories of self and stories of others) in this section with the intention of highlighting the nuances of those stories and the role they play in the journey and navigation of the participants. These stories of connections are also stories of place and space, *tūrangawaewae* (having a place to stand, somewhere you feel connected to and empowered by). Invariably the people and the places in the stories are interwoven, forming the powerful socio-historical contexts in which the young people are developing their identities. These stories form the third part of this section.

### **Stories of solidarity and collective memory**

I found it particularly interesting that the lived experiences of the participants encompass the stories and lessons of others' lived experiences. In other words, the young people in the study did not have to physically live the experience in order for it to be a significant part of their lived experience. These include stories of the experiences of other family members, friends and peers, as well as people they feel a personal connection to, such as those involved in historical events and transgenerational trauma. They all have their place in the participants' story of self, their being and becoming. Many of the participants mention their grandparents and four speak about them as a source of influence and inspiration in detail. But it is not so much the actual time spent with their grandparent that they speak of as influential (though this is also true), but it is the storying of the actions they took, the values they held and the way in which the young person feels connected to their grandparent through that storying. Henare first mentions his maternal grandfather, who "was an educator" and served in the war. He then continues:

Henare: *Both my grandfathers were in the war. Yeah, I think about them and I think about what they did for us. I don't know if a lot of people do, but you know, they sacrificed a lot. I take that on board. Just push-on, push-on, push-on.*

Henare feels motivated to continue his work in creating affordable sustainable social housing when he thinks about the sacrifices his grandfathers made. He also expresses gratitude to them for those sacrifices, acknowledging "what they did for us" in terms of securing our way of life, our democracy in New Zealand. Later in the interview he returns to the actions of his grandfathers when he is asked to describe the actions he is taking:

Henare: *I'm just, well, we are – like the boys and that as well – we're just trying to do our part really. Yeah, trying to do our part for ...you know I sort of go back to my grandfathers, they did their part back in their time, you know. We're not in a war but I think we've got some pretty horrific situations that we're probably not fully aware of so we are maybe in a war that we just don't quite know that we're in, so here we are doing our part.*

Maria: *What's the war against?*

Henare: *I think um, I think it's against greed, really. I think people are just far too self-absorbed and greedy. They're not looking after the person to the left and to the right of them, just looking at themselves.*



It is clear that Henare has been deeply influenced by the knowledge that his grandfathers were in the war. He does not give any details about their specific experiences, what is significant to Henare's lived experience is their involvement in something larger than themselves and the fact that "they did their part". Henare does not see himself as an activist, but as a member of a group "just trying to do our part". By drawing parallels between his own actions and those of his grandfathers, he is bringing urgency to the "pretty horrific situations" of his community. The fact that he uses the metaphor of war to describe those situations reinforces the seriousness with which he views the problems facing our society. The greed and selfishness of people in our society are what Henare is fighting against in doing his part. Moreover, having his grandfathers' lived experiences nestled within his own lived experience heightens his connection to his grandfathers and gives him strength to "push-on, push-on, push-on". The storying of "doing our part" has become an important part of Henare's identity as someone working to bring about change.

Storying the past is also an important part of Adam's identity. He begins the narrative of his journey of social justice action with an acknowledgement that his grandfather

Adam: *was a strong influence growing up. He'd fought in the war in North Africa and Italy, came back as a very committed pacifist... after that...led a delegation from New Zealand to China, after the revolution there, for the New Zealand Peace Council ...um, and as he liked to tell me, he shook the hand of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai! ...it's difficult to tease out exactly...by the time that I'd sort of got to be really engaged myself on that level - in general – not specifically to that [pacifism] – he'd sort of developed dementia and we never quite had that meeting of minds per se. So instead what it was was a firm commitment to peace and the like...and a range of other things...and love...peace and love really. That's what he was about. Yeah, and that sort of really came through the generations, particularly my father, who my mother had met working through the trade union movement.*

The strength of the connection between the values held and espoused by Adam's grandfather and the actions that he takes and his son (Adams' father) and then his grandson (Adam) take is clear. Adam suggests that these values - "a firm commitment... to peace and love" – are inherited "through the generations" and despite the fact that his grandfather was not speaking to him directly about his lived experiences due to his declining memory

and health, Adam was strongly influenced by his grandfather nevertheless. The fact that Adam mentions that his parents “met working through the trade union movement” illustrates this idea of the values being passed down through the generations.

The awareness of the messiness of tracing memory, stories and experiences is expressed in Adam’s comment that “it’s difficult to tease out exactly”. Other participants echo this same feeling, and through the analysis of all of their stories and memories, what stands out to me is that these connections with loved ones and knowing the stories of their experiences, is what is powerful. It is the storying – the act of telling the stories – that helps forge them as part of their own journey. For example, Rose speaks of the influence of her maternal grandmother, calling her a “very active social activist” and, like Adam, recalls the knowledge of what her grandmother stood for, rather than having her grandmother directly mentor her as an activist:

Rose: *She passed away when I was nine or ten so my relationship with her was just more of a typical grandchild-grandparent sort of relationship. But I think that the thing that really inspired me... was her relationship with activism. Her involvement with Amnesty International and political organisations and things like that inspired me when I became a little bit older and started to engage more in my teenage years in organisations like Amnesty International and to think about how I really wanted to be involved in social change.*

As Rose says, her real inspiration came from the idea of her grandmother as an activist rather than her actual relationship with her grandmother. Rose held onto the knowledge and storying of her grandmother’s “relationship with activism” and later engages in similar causes, particularly Amnesty International when a group starts up at her high school. To pick up on Adam’s idea, what Rose is referring to is an involvement that she feels has been inherited from her grandmother.

Incorporating the lived experiences of loved ones through storying the past also emerges through the participants’ narratives of others’ suffering or injustices. Rose shares that her grandfather “was half African Jamaican” and states that this lineage “has definitely always been a motivating force within my family” to be involved in “racially motivated activism

around racial equality and stuff like that... although ostensibly myself and my parents were white and English.” Charlizza tells me about her grandmother who had been prohibited from speaking te reo Māori as a child and the impact that had:

Charlizza: *my Nan, she raised me pretty much and so yeah she had a bit of influence and she went to school around the time of the native...um the Native School's Act and so she was like... she couldn't speak. She grew up fluent in te reo and then went to school and was punished for speaking Māori at school and then punished for speaking English at home and then she just ended up not speaking at all and being illiterate in both, not just English but also Māori because she was just too afraid to communicate in any kind of language...she had a lot of influence on me growing up too... my passion for working with young Māori youth, I guess and ...learning about what happened in her time and before her time and just like the rippling effects of colonisation and how young people today are still suffering from things...you know like...that happened way back then and I guess that is a little bit to do with why I am [doing this].*

Charlizza absorbs her grandmother's experiences and stories into her own story, making a direct connection between policies imposed by colonial rule, events occurring prior to her lifetime and the work she does empowering Māori youth. Another participant, Adam, also included the story of his grandmother being denied her Māori identity<sup>6</sup>:

Adam: *a small portion of my whakapapa traces back to the Whanganui, through my grandmother who was born in that area but she was the first of her family to be given an English name, or a predominately English name. All the others in the family had not. And um, quite deliberate, not a coincidence, that around the same time was when the beatings in public school for speaking te Reo. It's a real marker of shame, in fact, for my grandmother to this day, she's 99 now, so she was born in 1917. So to the point where she was, she's Māori, but she would never admit to anyone, including herself. So, there's a disconnection there, as I think there is for a lot of people who trace their whakapapa to different hapū throughout the country.*

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<sup>6</sup> See p.184 of this thesis for discussion of the impacts of intergenerational trauma. Pihama et al. (2014) provide a detailed discussion of the need to examine the intergenerational impacts of trauma on Māori through a historical trauma lens.

When taken into account with the full interview data from Adam, it seems that the knowledge of his grandmother's shame and disconnection, her lived experiences, form a significant foundation for the work that Adam does in facilitating interaction and understanding between people and communities. He is keenly aware of the importance and power that language and communication hold and takes great care in the interview to articulate meaning in a way that accurately represents what he means rather than the way in which others may perceive the meaning of what he says.

It seems that each of these four young people find strength in being able to connect their present actions and understandings to the experiences of their grandparents. It perhaps lends validation to their identities and actions and a feeling that they are carrying on the work of their loved ones, or are at least upholding the values they instilled in the family. But there is a messiness in this storying, as Adam says, and these tensions of the past, including the injustices experienced by others, seem to act as a motivating factor, whether explicitly articulated as such or not. Ultimately, in choosing to share the stories of others as part of their own story, the participants acknowledge that their experiences are deeply connected to the experiences of others. These collective memories and stories of solidarity are woven into their *kete*.

### **Stories of lived experiences**

I asked participants to tell me about their lives, to tell of their motivations and inspirations for getting involved in social action for social justice; it is therefore not surprising that a huge amount of the data collected was coded with the initial code 'using lived experiences.' Within this broad theme it became apparent that experiencing loving and supportive relationships with people in their lives is important. For most of the participants this includes one or both parents. The nature of the support and level of influence varies from participant to participant and the experiences are nearly always contextualised in an attempt to help me to understand the other elements and factors that were at play and influencing the relationship. In this way, the participants showed great ability to reflect and be reflexive, while also highlighting the significance of the contexts of the particular lived experience they were recalling.

Charlizza, for example, speaks of the impact of her mother, who was a social worker:

*it was probably seeing the change that she made, like with young people that came into our home you know and then years down the track having them come back and say things like 'If it wasn't for you, my life would have gone a totally different direction.' And I just remember thinking like that was just like so awesome to have impacted someone else's life like that and yeah, I just one day dreamt about doing that for other young people.*

Moreover, the particular issues that Charlizza became involved in and passionate about came from her experience of being a young girl whose father took his own life:

*You know when you have lost someone [to suicide]...you just get this overwhelming feeling of like, I've gotta do something, you know? ...it's kind of like a sense of if I let them slip through, I'm not going to let that happen to another, I would never wish this upon my worst enemy and so I am going to do what I can do.*

This motivation to prevent other people from feeling the pain that she has experienced is then magnified by the fact that Charlizza is Māori and knows the legacy and the injustices of colonisation upon her family and wider Māori society. This provides another reason for her to take social action:

*I've got a passion for youth development... so always social issues, and Māori and Pasifika young people and so... the social issues that I am really passionate about, are usually social issues that mainly effect that demographic. So things like, you know, the youth suicide in New Zealand, it's highest among Māori by like a lot and so that was pretty much like a no brainer*

It is clear that these intersecting elements of Charlizza's past experiences - seeing her mother work with troubled youth, experiencing the heart-break of her father's suicide, having an illiterate grandmother, knowing and seeing the lasting effects of colonisation on Māori, and having a love of language and story-telling from her grandfather – create richly storied lived experiences of connections, knowledge and opportunities for agency from which Charlizza can draw upon in the present.

Nearly all of the participants acknowledged having parents who held values consistent with social justice. They recall that values such as caring, fairness and equity were modelled or spoken about in general in their homes and seen in interactions with the community. Josh credits his mother for raising five sons on her own and calls her “the saving grace of our family...the one kind of parental figure and role model that I’ve had to look up to.” He specifically mentions that his mum is a nurturing woman, ready to help others out when they need it. His grandmother moved into the house after having a stroke, a cousin was welcomed in during a period that he needed to get away from bad influences in his life, for example. “I’ve just always seen that you take in people and you look after them and make sure that you... that everyone gets a fair go, everyone gets a chance at anything, even if they’ve screwed up before.”

The caring and compassion that Josh expresses here is echoed throughout the interviews with the participants and is central to many of the stories of their past experiences. Molly speaks of her education at a Steiner school, chosen by her parents because they wanted a respectful and nourishing learning environment for their children. Anya acknowledges the environmental justice and social justice values of her parents and notes how these are reflected in the work that they have chosen to do. She later also mentions that her family is Quaker, “a weird type of religion that treats people well and that’s about it...treat everyone with respect pretty much.” Tim recalls attending Sunday School and Catholic church services, and reflects upon the values nurtured in that space, combined with the values of service to the family of the *fa’amatai* (Samoan chiefly system) that he sees his father committed to, as significant underpinnings for his experiences. Both Tabby and Rose describe their parents as having liberal view points, and know the stories of protests they had been part of. Nishhza describes the influence of her parents:

Nishhza: *There were things when I was growing up that my parents did that I saw as good and I wanted to be like them. My dad’s a doctor and in Malaysia he did a lot of free treatment for Indians – in Malaysia Indians are the lower socio-economic group. He did subsidised treatment for Indians and he did free treatment for refugees because there are a lot of Myanmar/Burmese refugees in Malaysia. And so, I saw that.*

Participants also told stories of their lived experiences that incorporated supportive family environments in general. Here, Joshua values the multiple opportunities his parents gave him to discover his passions:

Joshua: *My parents enrolled me into arts classes, maths classes, dance classes, drama classes, like every single painting class, self-defence, swimming class – every little thing that you could think of, my parents made me do it, and they forced me to do it, because they really believed that I should try all these different things until I found my thing – the thing that makes me click, the thing that makes me happy. And so that was the support – they really supported me in all areas.*

These stories of experiencing support can be seen as foundations for the participants' own social justice values and desire to make a difference in the world. However, it is important to acknowledge that for some of the participants these supportive parental relationships are fraught with complexities, contradictions and tensions that also contribute significantly to the social actions they choose to take in the present. Three participants speak of the impact of growing up with a parent who experiences mental health issues, while Nishhza describes how the expectations of her parents that she become an engineer or a lawyer, contributed to her own experience of depression.

Another significant theme to emerge in storying the past is that connections between the participants and the issues that they are passionate about are forged without a direct family connection being present. For example, Molly speaks of a lived experience that she sees as transformative to her activist identity. As a 22-year-old she attended a Treaty of Waitangi workshop that “opened [her] up to injustice.” She explains the impact the workshop had on her:

Molly: *I just felt like this white privileged, ignorant person and I was like ‘I have just been manipulated and let down by the education system, by government, by my country’ – and I was just so angry and I felt like everything had been stolen – like the light had been stolen a little bit from everything I saw ... And this person, Susan, she’s an amazing woman, I was just like, “I feel so guilty, I feel so stupid!” And she was like “this is so important that you don’t take on that guilt”, you know, like “once you’re privy to the truth it’s a responsibility.”*

During the interview Molly makes the distinction between the supportive, nourishing environment of her home life and the amazing experiences she has in a Rudolf Steiner learning environment, and this jarring workshop experience where she is exposed to the continuing injustices for Māori due to colonisation. Significantly, Molly had been exposed to protests and marches through her mother's activism as well as her best friend's activism, who she describes as having an impressive and inspiring commitment to environmental justice. But merely having these connections does not equate to Molly taking social action because she had not "found her avenue" yet. Once Molly learns a new way of seeing the world that she thought she knew, she becomes determined to learn more and make other privileged people aware of their privilege and their responsibility to help bring about change.

Molly is not the only participant to include stories of gaining knowledge and developing a critical consciousness, it was a strong theme to emerge from the data. The focus group agreed that finding the cause or issue that you are passionate about and then learning more about it was a crucial part of their social action journey. Where this learning happened varied from university courses to involvement in social justice campaigns run by NGOs to conversations with mentors and/or peers to searching the internet, watching documentary films and reading social media feeds. Notably, only two participants attribute knowledges they have gained to the formal setting of school and the curriculum. Moreover, the stories of gaining knowledge (such as Molly's above) are often linked to a particularly inspirational person. As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature highlights the significance of cross-age collaborations between youth and adults - a grandparent, parent, university lecturer, a teacher, a colleague, a mentor; but many of the significant mentoring relationships my participants spoke about were also with other young people - a friend, a boyfriend/girlfriend/partner, a co-worker, a peer in a youth group. There is also an acknowledgement from several of the participants that an important part of gaining a deeper understanding of issues involves being made aware of previous assumptions and biased knowledge. What is clear from these participants is that the experience of what is learned and who it is learned from are intertwined in the storying, suggesting that the context in which the knowledge is (un)learned plays an important part in it becoming



significant enough to be integrated into the young person's storying repertoire. A significant element of that context, it emerged, are the places and spaces of the lived experiences of both self and others.

### **Tūrangawaewae – having a place to stand**

Places and spaces held great importance in many of the stories that participants told me in their interviews. To separate people from places in these stories would be a futile exercise, and so the examples included here merely serve to highlight the connection between people and places in these stories of the past, to show how they are an important part of the identity process for the participants. *Tūrangawaewae* is a Māori word meaning *a place to stand*. It is an important concept in te ao Māori (the Māori world). This concept of feeling connected and empowered, having a place that serves as foundational to being and identity emerged as a strong theme from the data, for all participants, not just those of Māori descent. I provide examples of the ways in which the participants' spoke of experiences that are intertwined with a particular place or space.

Henare spoke specifically about *tūrangawaewae* and how the concept triggered his motivation to push for hemp to be recognised as a compliant building material in the New Zealand building industry. His experiences of growing up in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods in Hastings and Wellington with predominantly state housing, mainly inhabited by Māori families, inform his understanding as an adult:

Henare: *You spend time with the whānau back in some of these places and you just know you look at your own cousins and know that they're probably never gonna be able to afford a house and that's just the truth of it. And that really struck me. It scared me, cos being Māori you need that place to stand...you need that tūrangawaewae ...yeah... and I know it's important and that was something that drove me definitely.*

For Henare, the problem of housing affordability is deeply personal and connected to cultural values that affirm the relationship between a person and a place to stand, somewhere that is theirs and cannot be taken away from them by shifting government policy. In aligning the concept of *tūrangawaewae* with home ownership, Henare is acknowledging the damage that has been done to Māori in the rapid urbanisation and move

to state housing, away from traditional tribal lands and ways of living. He indicates that there is a great loss involved that goes beyond the financial inequality of the housing market. The solution that he is working towards, therefore, has more meaning than creating affordable and sustainable housing. Something he confirms later in the interview when he says, “My *tikanga*<sup>7</sup> (practice) is about social outcomes.”

Aotearoa New Zealand is an island nation in the South Pacific. Stories of place are also stories of moving; journeys in search of *tūrangawaewae*. Several of the participants did not start their lives in New Zealand or have spent time living in other countries. Tabby and Rose both moved here from the United Kingdom, Molly from Australia, Nishhza from Malaysia; Connor spent several years of his childhood as an expat in Fiji, while Tim speaks of his family connection to Samoa where his father maintains a significant role in village life as the chief. And for the other participants, born and raised in New Zealand, their ancestors at some point migrated here, whether by *waka* (canoe) across the Pacific Ocean, or sailing ships or aeroplanes. Joshua’s grandparents migrated here from Samoa; Anya’s mother is from Denmark. The stories of journeying to a new place are part of the storying of the participants’ past.

Several of the participants recall experiences of moving that were beyond their agency, the decision being made for them by their parents or grandparents. These experiences had significant impacts on the lives of the participants, particularly because a new place meant a new school. For some this was a positive experience. Tabby, for example, relays a sense of good fortune, luck or serendipity associated with a move to a new place:

Tabby: *My family moved to Nelson and I happened to go to the first school in the Australasia Pacific region to have a Queer Straight Alliance group – which was Nayland College in Nelson.*

This move provided a radical change from Tabby’s previous high school where she felt unsafe to explore her identity. In the telling of the story, Tabby recognises that moving to

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<sup>7</sup> *Tikanga* means traditional or customary practices and behaviours that are used to govern Māori society. Henare is using the word here in a similar way to the word *kaupapa* is used, which means the underlying philosophy or concepts on which *tikanga* are based.

that city (the fourth move her family made since arriving from the UK) and ending up at that particular school was significant as a foundation for her identity as a queer female and an activist. The supportive and welcoming culture of the school and the opportunity to connect with other queer students enabled her to flourish.

For other participants, these experiences of being accepted and feeling a sense of belonging in a school environment are taken away from them when they move schools. Two participants speak of the hurt this caused them. Molly moved schools so that she could spend more time with each of her separated parents, but found the large high school very different to the Steiner school she had previously attended:

Molly: *I felt like this foreign little alien and people are like 'she's so weird' and I'm like, 'I'm just who I am'...And playtime and lunch time would feel weird and people were mean to me and I was bullied. I lasted a term and I went back to Steiner.*

Connor contrasts his experiences of attending an international school in Fiji with the primary school in a "tiny" South Island town he goes to when his father moves back to New Zealand:

Connor: *...at my school there we had about 50 kids. That was a really nice place for people who weren't like me. For people who fit in really well and were into their sports and stuff. Not for the boy who just wanted to go do ballet and paint pictures...I don't know if terrified is the right word, I was kinda shocked because the girls and boys were treated so differently... I was, not bullied, but separated a bit because I didn't fit into this hetero-normative lifestyle and I think that kind of continued throughout my school years in New Zealand.*

While the experiences for both Connor and Molly are initially beyond their own control and they have little agency, they each perform agency at future points. Molly does so rather rapidly. After one term at her new school she decided "*this is ruining me*" and returned to the Steiner school, despite the distance this created between her and her father who had moved to another part of Auckland. When Connor was about 15, he made a conscious decision to move to the school that his boyfriend attended. He knew it to be safe and accepting of rainbow identifying students because one day at assembly, at his previous all

male school, Tabby came to speak to the students about creating a Queer Straight Alliance in the school. Connor recalls:

*[She was] basically just saying that if you're queer, that's perfectly ok and that there's places for you and these are some resources online. I didn't use any of the resources, but I just remember sitting there feeling really cold because it was the first time in my life I'd heard myself talked about positively. It's had a really profound affect on me and I know it did on others in the room that day as well... It was something I'd never seen – I'd never heard positive representation in media.*

In these examples from Tabby, Molly and Connor's experiences, school can offer *tūrangawaewae*, a safe place, somewhere they could feel accepted and valued. However, these same young peoples' experiences also show that school can be the opposite of *tūrangawaewae*. Other participants also included stories of school and moving schools, either as a distinct decision on their part or due to a decision made by a parent. The inclusion of such stories show that the impacts a school can have on the young people who attend it are significant. However, some of the participants were fairly dismissive of the school(s) they went to, choosing not to share much about their experiences at all, even when asked directly about them.

Another aspect of place to emerge from the stories of lived experiences is the relationship between the physical geography of a location and the people who live there. For Mike, being from a little town on the West Coast is a point of pride as well as a reason for the way he, and other West Coast people, behave:

Mike: *It's a hard little place but, I don't know, everyone is so friendly... I guess we get that strong will from the Coast because a lot of things have been taken away from us. We've got to be strong.*

As an example of that strength Mike revealed that his family had operated a successful timber mill that was forced to shut by the government some time ago, despite winning a court case to keep the mill open. Mike comes from a place and people who have advocated and fought for their existence, and they extended this fighting spirit to advocate for Mike's right to access education in public schools alongside his peers. They did not want Mike in a

separate special education school. This strength is further illustrated by the experiences Mike faced in his late teens, living in Christchurch for better schooling opportunities. The earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011 have had a major impact on Mike and his community, as he acknowledges:

*I guess, everyone just gets treated the same. I'm not saying all of New Zealand, there's sort of parts to it, but in my part of Christchurch, everyone just treats everyone the same. And I think it might have been because of the earthquake as well. Brought everyone together. And it's probably a good thing. Not just my area, my local Minister [Member of Parliament] is someone I can talk to [he is smiling, clearly feels this strongly]. Nicky Wagner – Minister for disability issues. Even though she's a top person, I just see her as any other person.*

These examples show how sharing difficult experiences in a particular place can provide opportunities for strength at an individual level as well as a community level. This contributes to the development of personal and social identities.

### **Tūrangawaewae – needing a place to belong**

It is significant to point out that in the storying of their past, the lived experiences that the participants chose to share with me were often to do with belonging and feelings of exclusion. Most of the examples I have selected in the chapter so far focus on experiences of belonging or wanting to belong. These are the experiences of young people coming to know and accept themselves and find acceptance from others. Nearly all of the participants identify as part of one or more minority groups: five identify as LGBTQI+ or part of the rainbow community; seven have non-white ethnic heritage; one has a learning disability. About two thirds of the participants mentioned feeling like they did not fit in or stood out in some way: they were “weird”, “odd”, “misplaced” and thought differently to others. Significantly, this theme was raised in the focus group by one of the participants, Rose. After listening to the others share some of their lived experiences, she said:

Rose: *I think it's interesting that this is what other people are focusing on as well...the feeling of being other or different or like outsider. And in terms of exclusion versus inclusion and that lived experience of exclusion and wanting to work for inclusion not only in terms of my own lived experience,*

*but probably as a result partially of that, for other people who are having other experiences as well as for people who are having similar or the same experiences as I have had.*

The others in the group agreed with her summation and the discussion turned to how experiences in exclusionary spaces has motivated their desire to take social action that provides opportunities for more inclusion:

Josh: *The bad things affect you and your way of thinking a lot more than the positive or neutral things ever could.*

Molly: *Yeah you understand it and internalise it and don't want anyone else to feel like that...*

Connor: *I think those bad experiences are really important in terms of being able to be an empathetic person. And being able to understand what needs to change. But I think it needs to be coupled with positive examples and ideas and representations of what it will look like when we take away those bad things, when we take away those social justice issues or those environmental issues, what the flip side is and being able to acknowledge that otherwise you're kind of directionless...*

This exchange in the focus group highlights how the participants view their lived experiences as vital to their journey of being and becoming a social activist, and how developing empathy for others has been an integral part of that process. Connor's final statement in the quotation about needing positive examples in order to provide direction illustrates how stories of the past are carried with the young person, in their *kete*, as they are navigating the present, and guided by the direction of an imagined future. It is having a solid place to stand and belong that allow the participants to engage in exclusionary spaces that they encounter in safe ways.

### **Summary of storying the past**

This section has presented ways in which the participant's storying of the past emerged as a significant process in being and becoming young social activists. I have used the metaphor of *kete* to convey how stories of others' lived experiences, as well as their own lived experiences are carried with them as a resource to draw upon as they navigate their present journeys. Woven through these stories of the past are connections to people, places and

social justice issues. A strong theme of *tūrangawaewae* emerged, as the young people framed their stories as experiences of belonging, empowerment and a search for these connections due to experiences in exclusionary spaces. This section has also highlighted the importance of seeking, gaining and sharing knowledges as an integral part of the lived experiences of the participants and the way in which they choose to perform their agency. This category, agency, will be further unpacked in the following section, navigating the present.

## Part II – Navigating the present

*“Whai whakaaro – follow that thought”* (Nishhza, quoting mentor Moana Jackson)

*“We’re just trying to do our part”* (Henare)

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the metaphor of navigating emerged from the data and took on greater significance during the process of constant comparative analysis. This section explores how young people in the study navigate their current experiences, with an explicit focus on the social actions they are taking. I make links between the participants’ past and their present, the experiences they carry in their *kete*, though these are not always explicitly pointed out in an effort to limit repetition. The section headings use gerunds, indicating the active nature of the navigation as a process that is constant and dynamic, as well as providing a grounded theory approach as outlined in Chapter 3. I present five key themes to emerge in the participants’ navigating:

- taking and creating opportunities
- taking risks
- empowering others
- challenging liminal positionings
- negotiating demands on time

The processes are not distinct nor irreducible; they are interrelated and intertwined throughout the everyday experiences of the participants in ways that may constrain or enable the young person’s capacities to form connections, develop knowledges and perform agency. This section thus develops the young person as navigator metaphor.

### **Taking and creating opportunities**

In navigating their journey, the young people in the study are continuously taking and creating opportunities. The participants' lived experiences were full of examples that highlighted their agency in taking opportunities that arose through connections with other people, learning through those opportunities, becoming empowered themselves and then creating opportunities for other people to learn, take social action and in turn empower others. Both of these processes – taking and creating opportunities – involve the young people drawing upon what Wood (2014) refers to as participatory capital and Ginwright (2007) calls critical social capital (see Chapter 2). In short, the participants' networks of social connections and their growing knowledge of the issues that they are passionate about combine as significant resources in their *kete*. The examples that I present in this section illustrate the interconnectedness of the central categories of this grounded theory – connection, knowledges and agency – as well as how the processes of storying the past and imagining the future are central to the way in which they are navigating the present.

As presented in Part I of this chapter, it emerged very early on in the analytical process that the participants' recall of specific opportunities to become involved in various activities, events and meetings is a significant part of their being and becoming activists. Often, these opportunities come in the form of an invitation. For example, Mike speaks of being asked to join several different seminars, panels and committee groups as an advocate for people with disabilities. The way Mike recounts his response to these invitations typifies the humbleness shown by most of the other participants as well: *"yeah, why not?"*, *"oh yeah, flick me an email"*, and *"yeah, sounds interesting"*. In other words, accepting requests to become involved is not really seen as a decision, more as an inevitability. This sentiment is also evident in Connor's statement, *"it's kind of like I cared so much I couldn't help but do it"* and Tabby's recollection that *"someone needed to step in...it wasn't a formal process, it kind of just happened"*. This awareness of the organic, even serendipitous, nature of taking opportunities should not belie the fact that these young people *accept* opportunities offered to them or that become available. Getting involved is a performance of agency.

The participants clearly take the initiative when it comes to taking and creating opportunities, but it is also significant that that they acknowledge the importance of having



people to collaborate with, people who mentor them and help to support and motivate them. For Henare and the other participants, critical social capital or participatory capital are important to the process of navigating towards their social justice horizons:

Henare: *I honestly googled sustainable building materials and hemp came up. And that was it... I guess I've always been a bit of an optimist and I thought well, I might be able to do this...I don't know anything about the logistics or legalities of hemp but I'll give it a shot. I've got some old friends who have done quite well and landed up in good positions in Wellington and in the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment so I rang up the old bro and say "what do you reckon about growing hemp?"*

Here, Henare states his approach to life is an optimistic one and he exudes the 'can do' kiwi attitude with his statement "I'll give it a shot". His immediate action is then to connect with an old friend who has a position of power within a governmental ministry and potentially holds more knowledge about the process he will need to go through to grow hemp and turn it into a building material. Put simply, Henare has an idea, finds a possible solution and reaches out to his social network to create an opportunity to bring the idea to life. This is a pattern that emerged from the experiences of most of the participants. When I asked Charlizza about who her adult allies were in the work she does with young people around youth suicide, she replied:

Charlizza: *I feel like really lucky cos not only am I Māori, I'm Christian so I have got huge um [laughs] you know. So at my church a lot of the clinical support we get comes from people volunteering from my church, so we have paediatricians, GPs, psychiatrists, registered nurses and they actually attend the majority of our rehearsals and workshops and things like that. And like, you know, one of the women at our church, she's a paediatrician, I can't remember actually, whatever she does she is only one of two people in New Zealand that do what she does and she runs these workshops that are usually hundreds of dollars and she comes and runs them with our volunteers for free. So we are like really really lucky in that way that we have networks with some really quite switched on people.*

Charlizza's quote shows the way that others' expertise is used as an opportunity to learn and grow for her and the other volunteers of the programme. It is clear that in taking these opportunities the young people are then able to simultaneously and actively create opportunities for themselves and for others. In the focus group, Anya, explicitly spoke

about her motivation to create opportunities because she had benefitted so much herself from the opportunities she had taken (joining the debate team, becoming a member of the youth council for her city). Through her involvement in those activities, Anya identified a need for a space for young people to come together and be empowered to make change about the pressing social justice issue of climate change. So, while still in high school, she started the Climate Challenge conference which brings together about 100 teenagers annually<sup>8</sup>.

I have highlighted examples of quite large-scale opportunities that the participants created, but it is also important to note that much of what these young people do, the opportunities taken and created, is to do with everyday decision-making and communication. Taking the opportunity to speak with people and have their viewpoint heard is one such everyday action that all of the participants use as a navigating tool. This is not always a straightforward decision to make. In the focus group, Rose raises the struggle she has in deciding how much of her identity and values she shares when having conversations with people associated with her film making work. She decides that she is not going to censor herself because:

Rose: *in any area of social activism, but particularly feminism...one of the most important things is conversation – and if the conversation is becoming censored before it even leaves your mouth, or pen, or keyboard, or whatever, then there's no chance for progress really.*

Participants also identified an important element of this theme of taking opportunities when they raised the issue of self-care and the need to be selective about what to get involved in and what to pass up on. The focus group also discussed this, and I develop this theme later in Part II as I present findings of the young people negotiating the demands on their time.

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<sup>8</sup> The first Climate Challenge was held in 2015. At the time of writing the thesis in 2019, the Climate Challenge had involved over 1000 young people in eight conferences. <http://www.climatechallenge.co.nz/>

The following section will explore how, in taking and creating these opportunities to connect, learn and perform agency, the participants are taking risks. This forms an important aspect of the process of navigating towards their social justice horizons.

### **Taking risks**

The majority of the participants indicated that they see themselves as risk-takers, people who are prepared to move out of their comfort-zone and try something different. They spoke of taking risks in different areas of their lives, not only in the actions they take for social justice but as a general attitude, approach or disposition. There is recognition in the participants' narratives that this willingness to take risk – to make decisions and take action in the face of uncertainty – is part of them, who they are, as well as a way in which they perform agency.

The notion of risk taking as being open to new ideas, embracing and acting upon other possibilities was the most common to emerge from the data. The participants' narratives often involved an account of how they learned something, met someone else who was like-minded and decided to try a new approach (in that given context) to solve the issue. Throughout the process the young people recognise the need to just “give it a go” even if they get cautioned or constrained by others. In this way, the act of taking risks becomes intertwined with showing leadership. For example:

Henare: *I'm more risky than a lot of people around me are. That being said, I think it gives me a good sense of confidence. That I can just go and talk to someone about a crazy idea that I might have thought of yesterday that I think could work – it doesn't bother me for them to say you're an idiot. I can accept that making mistakes is part of the process. I can accept that, but it's not going to slow me down.*

Participants also echoed the same sentiment as Henare does here about not being an expert, but the urgency of the issue and their desire to see change leads them to get involved. While many of the participants identify as risk-takers, they describe their experiences as something that just happens as a result of being so passionate about the social justice issue they are working for. When they speak about their actions, past and present, it is without any explicit framing of their actions as a decision to be taking risks:

Connor: *It's kind of like, this work needs to be done and somebody needs to do it, and well, I can do it. Nobody else is there right now, so I can do it. I'll try my hardest.*

For a number of participants, the act of being their authentic self involves taking risks because they do not know how safe and accepted they will be in many situations. This was a very strong theme in the interviews with participants who identified as part of the rainbow community, and was raised in the focus group as well:

Josh: *When you put yourself in a space where not necessarily everyone agrees with what you are saying or fighting for, you put yourself at physical risk.*

In the focus group discussion, the participants also linked their willingness to take risks with that of standing out, being different from their peers, as illustrated in the storying the past section, and in this comment from Henare: "I thought everybody thought how I thought but then as I got older I realised, not even." The agreement from the others in the group affirmed this as a shared experience and as something innate within them.

However, there was also recognition that being a risk-taker is an attitude or approach that can be fostered by mentors and role models. Several participants spoke of being encouraged by others who they have a connection with. The following exchange took place after the focus group, when I interviewed my final participant:

Maria: *Do you consider yourself a risk-taker?*

Joshua: *Yes. Yes, oh yes, a big yes. Yeah, I'm such a risk-taker.*

Maria: *And that's something...that you feel has always been part of your personality?*

Joshua: *Not, not – yeah, it's been nurtured - but it was mostly taught in primary school. They always encouraged us to take risks, especially when you're at that age. When you're young, it's your prime age to take risks, because, I guess, when you're a lot older, like, and you take a risk, it's like, "that's it" But when you're younger, it's, "oh well, there's the next opportunity." So I believe in risks.*

Along with other participants, Joshua clearly suggests that being open to taking risks is a significant part of the way the participants perform agency as they navigate their social action journey. The fact that Freire believes taking risks is essential to his existence (Shor & Freire, 1987) is discussed in Chapter 6.

### **Empowering others – the role of empathy and education**

As introduced in Part I, storying the past, participants' lived experiences have been significant in developing their empathy. The analysis also revealed the importance of empathy in the process of engaging with others, ideas and issues. It has a significant presence in each participant's *kete* and is foundational to the way in which they navigate the present. The following exchange during the focus group illustrates this point:

Molly: *Who identifies or associates as being empathetic? Someone who feels empathy for other people, someone who can closely relate to other people's experiences. [all raise their hands] That is the core of my existence.*

Henare: *Well you're not going to do any social action if you don't give a shit.*

Connor: *I don't know what the point of it would be if you didn't have that.*

Rose: *I do know some environmental activists who are not empathetic people.*

It is interesting that Rose points out that she knows environmental activists who seem to lack empathy, as it reinforces the context of this study as one of *social* activists. It highlights what Rose believes to be a point of difference between the motivations of the young people in the focus group and other activists. I did indeed seek participants who self-identified as people who take *social action for social justice*. The ability to empathise emerges as a significant part of the process of taking that action, as well as being a strong motivating factor to be involved in social action. Empathy is held within the *kete* and also serves as a guiding presence in the decisions that the young people make as they navigate towards their horizons and perform agency.

Joshua: *Empathy...I think we all need empathy, like, empathy is human. Empathy is the thing that makes us human. And I think that once you lose empathy, it's dangerous, like you need to stop whatever you're doing, and quit. Like I*

*think that if you don't know the why, if you cannot care for the people, if you cannot care in general, then I think that there needs to be a lot of reflecting and self-assessment...and I've had to do that. There's been times when I've been so busy and go, go, go, that you do lose a little bit of empathy, because, you know, it almost becomes robotic, when you're going from school to school, motivating, from student to student, form talk to talk, film to film, like you know, it can get quite robotic. And so, for me, empathy is a really big thing, it keeps you authentic to your why, and it keeps things real.*

Having empathy leads the participants to want to empower others, and the main way in which they speak of empowering others is through education:

Maria: *So it sounds like the education part of it is one of the big things you're pushing?*

Henare: *Definitely. Yeah, I'm quite into it cos I think it's empowering people, I think. Like if you know something, then you can go do it.*

Significantly when the participants speak of education or educating others, they do not explicitly mean through a school, or formal education setting. They draw upon their lived experiences (those woven into their *kete*) and want to share knowledge and understandings with others so that they may experience empowerment also. The significance of empowerment, and its relationship to collective agency is highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2 (see Figure 1, for example). In addition, Watts et al. (2011) argue that empowerment theory is closely related to critical consciousness: "Typically, empowerment theory examines the experience of collective or personal power that is associated with social change activity. It is also concerned with how community resources such as organizations can foster social power" (p.51).

A common way that participants empower others is through facilitating gatherings of people who are passionate about an issue or cause, and/or share common identity bonds (such as culture, ethnicity, disability and people of minority sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics). When describing these *hui* (meetings) and workshops, participants emphasised the importance of the knowledge and experiences of all the people gathered. This lengthy excerpt from my interview with Adam illustrates this in detail:

Adam: *About a month ago now, I ran a community leadership forum here...to bring a somewhat representative group of people together to kind of find a way forward that we could then scale up to the larger community. So, yeah, in that space we had people working in the environmental sector, we had tangata whenua, people working in the health sector, people with disabilities, we had myself and another council worker, there were community networker type people that are sort of in an administrative capacity. So I think there were 15-20 people there... The process is difficult to summarise with integrity in a way...you can't write it down and say it's the same every time. It's just a question of finding – yeah, again – that space where people can feel comfortable to express what it is they feel they need to express...we spent the first 80 percent of that meeting working through these issues, particularly around sort of the Treaty and the need to empower the mana whenua but also the tangata whenua more broadly, and it's just sort of funny cos we reached the point where we're, "Ok, so we're actually, we do share that kaupapa" and once we'd found that shared platform or floor for all of us to stand on, the last 20 percent was just brilliant! It was all of these ideas and passions and everything and we were all bouncing ideas off one another and we actually just came away with, I think, more than any of us had expected to. Both in terms of the connections between people that could suddenly be made – "oh you know actually, we'd really appreciate just a few lines of support here in our application because we think it can be quite easily dismissed if we're just environmentalists" so you know... "just a bunch of greenies", or "just them Māoris talking again", you know...but actually, if we're coming together, even with just a few words of support, then suddenly it's a lot harder for us to be dismissed.*

This “coming together” that Adam describes is at the heart of the ways in which all of the participants navigate towards social justice horizons. Not only is Adam strengthening his own *kete*, he is purposefully a part of facilitating others in weaving rich and meaningful knowledges into their *kete*. The agency performed in these processes is even more powerful in the realisation that these connections and shared *kaupapa* create critical social capital that means they are, together, more likely to be seen and heard – “it's a lot harder for us to be dismissed”.

Participants also acknowledged the role that social media played in helping to educate and empower, both themselves and others.

Tim: *Social media plays such a huge, huge role. Two of the organisations that I work with in Samoa, fantastic work no one knows about it and just through Facebook they have been able to connect with different organisations and*

*that do similar work or connect with youth who probably didn't know about their services or persons with disabilities who didn't know that they could access this type of support in the islands. Yeah it's really powerful, social media is really powerful. And so I am a bit of a whizz at doing that kind of stuff and writing media releases and blog pieces and sending them to the papers and you know writing stories for them.*

Just as Tim points out here, the ability of social media to connect people is identified as an important aspect by most participants. However, there was also a recognition by some participants that online interaction is not a substitute for face to face relationships:

Joshua: *I think social media, in terms of empowering young people...not so much. I think that social media can move people, can like mobilise people, but in terms of actual empowerment I feel that young people are hiding behind their screens, and that you can only connect – I feel that to empower someone you need to connect to them on a human level, and I feel that you can't engage with them on a human level through a screen. But then again, my [online] speeches are an exception, I've felt, but in terms of actual empowerment by social media as a medium, to like through videos and all that jazz...yeah...I don't know how I feel about it...*

As Joshua's final statement indicates, the participants are navigating their social actions in different ways and encounter complexities on that journey. Whether they are using social media and/or meeting with people in person, it is clear that empathy and education, through communication, play a significant role in the processes these young social activists engage with in order to empower other people. And as about a third of the participants noted, being able to empower people while maintaining their safety is made easier through the use of online spaces. Nishhza described how one project she worked on aimed to achieve this:

Nishhza: *We put together a handbook for youth survivors of family violence. And the handbook is really comprehensive so it talks about if you are going to leave you violent family home, the things like the legal processes and what to expect at the Shakti Safe House and how to basically live after you've left home as a young person. So, it covers things like food – how to prepare simple meals, how to grocery shop; mental health issues, signs to look out for ...and really basic things like, if you don't feel good today, have you tried having something eat? Things like that, that I guess, you know, young people, we get guidance about things like that from our family and our community and I guess we're being that community. I wrote the section on sexual and reproductive health because that's a topic that's not really*



*talked about in our community. But we also included a lot of validation – like if you are experiencing racism, it’s because we live in a settler colonial state, it’s not because you are weird or bad ... yeah, things I guess we have benefitted from when we were growing up as immigrants as well. So, we just finished that book and Shakti, the parent organisation, is really happy with it so we’re going to have an official launch for it next year. Which is exciting.*

The handbook is available as a free download from the Shakti Youth website and is also available in hard copy at the Shakti refuge centres. In this example of social action that Nishhza provides, and those that other the participants speak of, it is clear that empowering others is essential to the way that these young people navigate their lives as it gives them a sense of purpose and direction that goes beyond the self-interest and individual gain that are so central to both the neoliberal agenda and the dominant discourse of young people as apathetic and disengaged (see for example, Beals & Wood, 2012; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2007; Mutch, 2013a; O’Toole, 2015; Mirra & Garcia, 2017). The following section deals with another powerful discourse that the participants all navigate as they move towards their social justice horizons.

### **Challenging liminal positionings**

The narratives of the participants contain a multiplicity of experiences that illustrate the ways in which they challenge their liminal positionings. As already noted, being a young person is typically framed as in a period of transition between childhood and adulthood (White & Wyn, 1998; Wood, 2017). Growing-up and getting older comes with societal and cultural expectations that young people are given more control over that direction – they are allowed to (and encouraged to) move towards being independent autonomous members of society. Indeed, the very focus of learning in the social sciences curriculum is for students to learn how they “can participate and take action as critical, informed and responsible citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.17). However, as the lived experiences of these young people show, that increased expectation of performing agency is still very much controlled by the counter discourse that young people are not capable enough yet. They are placed in the liminal by society. I use this phrase in the same way that Beals and Wood (2012) do (as introduced in Chapter 2 on p.40). Each participant navigates according

to the particularities they are experiencing at any given point in time and using the lessons and stories their *kete* holds.

Many participants expressed frustration with knowing the value and strength of their experiences but not having these recognised by others, especially gatekeepers. Connor spoke at length and with passion about this:

Connor: *I think people don't value young voices. For example, we went to a school in Dunedin recently and one of the staff members, the first thing they said to me about our advice that we had for the school was, "so what are your credentials?" You know, those kind of comments. My response was, my credentials are I'm a young person who is in the position that I'm advocating for a few short years ago and that's something that can't be ...that can't happen from a degree. That's something that it doesn't matter how old you are, it's a very real experience, and I think these kinds of personal emic perspectives are so looked over and have been for decades in NZ ...and just people not taking young people seriously... I think that works against young activists, that we're not taken as seriously as someone with a degree, with more experience. But also, as young activists, how are we meant to have a degree and how are we meant to have this experience? It's impossible, I'm 20 years old, you can't expect me to have a masters already!*

Connor's critique highlights the tensions the participants feel as young activists who are not taken seriously by adults. Following the expected life-path of a successful young person – a 'good citizen' as it has become defined in 21<sup>st</sup> century Aotearoa – means completing year 13 of school and then beginning tertiary education in order to become suitably qualified to enter the workforce in a particular field. Participants expressed concern that this pathway is presented as linear and mandatory to young people, especially during their school years. This finding echoes the dominant narrative of youth studies literature as critiqued by White and Wyn, 1998; Wood, 2017; and Wyn, 2014. For the young people in this study who are choosing to navigate life in a different way, challenging the liminality of youth is part of their lived experience. They face questions of life-experience and qualifications and are expected to conform.

For some participants these tensions are resolved with creative, out of the box solutions. For example, a week or so prior to my meeting with Anya, she had decided that she would

not return to high school to complete year 13 and level 3 NCEA. She explains her reasons for taking an “alternative education” year:

Anya: *I realised that high school really wasn't the place for me because you know, you get all the work and you don't really get a lot of input in the school and like all the testing was so - you spend all your time on working on assessments rather than learning... So my theory of education is that you're just like trying to grow citizens, trying to educate them to get involved in society and be a working member of society and so I think civics is a really big part of that...which I guess is why I'm leaving school cos it's not growing me as a citizen by testing me lots.*

Anya experienced the space of formal schooling as a constraint to her ability to be and become an actively involved citizen and decides, age 16, to liberate herself from the school system and embark upon what she calls an “alternative education”. The spaces in which Anya decides to further her education as a citizen are political, entrepreneurial and creative: she set up internships with a Green Party MP, a social entrepreneur organisation and a photographer. Anya is not the only participant to critique the school system and formal education in the course of their interview; its ability to disempower and disengage them as young people emerged as one of the strongest themes of the study. This finding will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

The intersectionalities of the participants’ identities reveal the liminal space is not only a matter of their youth. This example from my interview with Mike, illustrates this:

Maria: *And how does it make you feel to work in that [advocate] role? You're taking something quite complicated and trying to simplify it...help families to understand it. How do you feel about that?*

Mike: *Sometimes, how do you describe it? The really big top people, they don't really listen to me.*

Maria: *Why do you think is?*

Mike: *I guess, they think this person with a disability doesn't know what he's talking about. But I sorta do, because even though I didn't go for a service provider, I sorta do know what I'm talking about.*

As seen in this exchange, Mike navigates his everyday activism challenging the liminality of being a person with a learning disability. He is aware of being seen as perpetually incapable of being an independent adult with valid knowledges and experiences to share with others, especially “the really big top people” who have power. It also emerged from the data that participants’ experiences of being situated at the threshold of adulthood, someone to be taken seriously, is linked to particular cultural contexts. For example, Tim speaks of his experiences:

Tim: *being young and Pacific in a place like this has been very challenging and probably in Pacific spaces it has been the most challenging, just because of those kind of like, I think it’s the cultural stereotypes around the roles of youth and I guess the challenges of navigating that within this space... I remember the first two years was really difficult because of my youth and the fact that - we have this concept in Samoa where we call people fiapoto, it’s just like a derogatory term you say to someone who is younger and who thinks they know how to function, when you really should be defaulting to your superiors - you know people who are older than you. And because when I came in and the position that I came into which essentially saw that these people were not under me but reporting to me, reporting through me, to my manager. The dynamics were just.... And there have been other instances where I kind of felt like I couldn’t really say something or there have been meetings I have just sat there and kept quiet basically because that’s how my role was perceived or you know that was the nature of the dynamics in the space and just comments people make. But I would say, way worse in Pacific spaces than mainstream spaces or other spaces.*

The participants are all very aware of how they are perceived as citizens-in-the-making. This framing of a transitional apprenticeship phase of life places them in the liminal and both affords them opportunity to navigate their own journey and effectively controls the landscape they are permitted to do this in. As seen in the examples above, some participants experience this more than others and experience it in different ways in different contexts. They are constantly navigating those contexts, drawing upon the skills and experiences of their *kete* while also learning and adding to their *kete*, particularly with the guidance of mentors. It is these connections to mentors that participants attribute to their ability to keep going, navigating their course with the support and encouragement of people who do not see their youth as a limitation, but a valuable strength. A specific issue

that emerged from the data which is directly related to the liminal positioning of young people is that they are constantly having to negotiate the demands made on their time.

### **Negotiating demands on time**

The way that participants navigate through the various expectations show that participants are very aware of the constraints on their time and this has a large impact on the decisions they make. First, there is the obvious factor that these are young people, and as already discussed, this places them in a liminal space in society. Five of the participants were studying fulltime when I first spoke with them, either at secondary or tertiary level. They spoke of the challenges of finding time for their studies while also being committed to social actions for social justice.

Josh: *I'm in high school. I've got to do, like, fifty million assessments, make sure I'm keeping my grades up and being a good head boy - I don't feel like I could call myself an activist. In my school, yes, maybe. But not in my community, you know?*

This shows the tension that Josh feels in navigating the present. He wants to participate at the maximal level of active citizenship (Wood, Taylor, & Atkins, 2013) but feels the pressure to first be achieving academically, then performing his leadership role as head boy effectively. For Josh, it seems that the priority must be the academic. He understands his identity as a high school student is to get good grades and to be a good role model to other students as he is the Head Boy. These responsibilities and expectations are incongruent with his understanding of fully being an activist. And as he states, he simply does not have the time to dedicate more of himself to activism at the moment. In contrast, Anya, as already shown above, chose to prioritise her own growth as an active citizen over the expectations of an assessment driven education system. These tensions will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Another aspect that young people in the study navigate is that much of the social action that they take is unpaid and this places pressure on them as they move towards fulltime employment. Nishhza, for example, speaks of volunteering in several organisations because they all support causes that she is passionate about. But she recognises that she will have to limit her social action at some point, for example:

Nishhza: *I really like the work that Shakti does, I really feel strongly about the work that I do for them... I'm going to keep working for them until I don't have time to do the [volunteer] work for Shakti anymore.*

Connor explicitly makes the point that actually having time to volunteer is a privilege, and a privilege that many people living in marginalised communities do not have due to the all-consuming role that paid work must take when you are discriminated against and struggling to make ends meet.

Connor: *I guess it's hard because people from within our community...there's a lot that happens because of this discrimination and a lot of that's to do with how hard it is for trans-people to find jobs and proper income and stuff...it correlates with not having proper trans media to put out...having the resources to be able to spend that amount of time to do that because for a lot of people, having that amount of time, volunteering, is actually a privilege. Being able to have that time to take out of your life when so many people just don't have that luxury, don't have that spare time.*

He considers himself fortunate to be in part-time paid employment for the activist work he does with InsideOUT while he completes his degree in anthropology. Molly, also completing her degree (in geography and environmental science) when I interviewed her, offered her own analysis of the way in which young peoples' time and focus is pulled to academic study and then part-time work to be able to survive. She told me of her involvement in the first anti-TPPA march in 2016 in great detail, followed by a comment that she wasn't as involved in the second march a few months later:

Molly: *And then I didn't do a lot of work with the second one, but constantly promoting it and talking about it – I say to people: "tell 10 people a day about the TPPA, see what happens!" But it's difficult and the energy fades, and you get consumed by work and uni and life – which is strategic hahaha!*

For Molly, the busy-ness of life is part of a strategy to keep young people (and older people) unaware of important issues such as the proposed TPPA, and unable to dedicate enough time to changing them even if they are aware of them. Molly credits her understanding of this strategy to what she has learnt at university, as well as the Treaty of Waitangi workshop

she attended a few years earlier. Her critique is one that fits with Kennelly's (2008) analysis of active citizenship in the neoliberal context: young citizens have a limited number of acceptable ways in which they may participate in society, essentially as individuals who make consumer choices and contribute in charitable ways. Structuring young people's lives with commitments to education, employment and social activities is a way of restricting their active participation to such acceptable behaviours, Kennelly argues. As I discuss in Chapter 6, many of the participants express this tension between being 'good citizens' in a neoliberal context and being committed to social justice, which means challenging and changing the status quo, thus threatening the system that they are also very much indoctrinated in and comfortable with. This is also another liminality for them to navigate through. The implications of this are that most of the participants are challenging and resisting in innovative ways within the system rather than making overt efforts to radically change or abolish existing structures. Chapter 6 will elaborate on this finding.

### **Summary of navigating the present**

Together the processes outlined in this section illustrate the ways in which the young people in the study navigate the present. The choices they make are influenced by the past experiences and learnings held in their *kete* and, as they navigate, they draw upon the contents of that *kete* to nurture and sustain them on their journey towards social justice horizons.

These young people taking social action have decided that they are not satisfied following pathways already determined to be acceptable for them – they do not wish to reproduce the status quo – they have seen a glimpse of the horizon (through connecting to like-minded people and learning more about the inequalities – seeing positive examples of change happening) and want to move towards that future without waiting to be old enough or experienced enough or qualified enough. They are challenging and resisting the liminality of their positioning in society. This section has shown that the participants take opportunities to be involved in projects and activities that they are passionate about and they also create opportunities for themselves and others to take action as well. In participating in these endeavours, the young people demonstrate that they are risk-takers who are willing and able to perform agency, with the support of others, so as to inspire and empower more

people to navigate towards their social justice horizons. Ultimately, it emerged that navigating the present is about being true to the self: finding a social issue that you have passion for and then doing everything you need to do to make your imagined future a reality. The final section of the findings chapter explores the hopes and visions of the participants and expands upon the metaphor of the social justice horizon that was introduced at the start of this chapter.

### **Part III – Imagining the future**

*A city and a nation – society – that’s resilient, inclusive and vibrant.* (Adam)

The third process to emerge from the data is an imagining of a future society where social justice is a horizon that people continually strive and work towards; where its awareness is embedded and operationalised into everyday life, schooling, policy and actions. In this section of the findings chapter I highlight how the values of empathy, service, equity, collaboration, sustainability and respect underpin the participants’ conceptualisation of social justice and examine the way in which that conceptualisation influences the navigation of the young social activists. This section demonstrates that the values expressed in the imaginings of the future are also woven throughout the *kete* of the participants’ lived experiences and guide the navigation of the present. They are all inextricably linked and all lead towards participants’ social justice horizons.

The participants’ imaginings are statements pertaining to the possibilities of the future. In my analysis I grouped the statements about the future into two broad types: *tangible goals*<sup>9</sup> and *social justice horizons*. Tangible goals are comprised of specific plans, outlines of strategies and lists of goals. They are often spoken about within a context of what is needed to be done, the “small steps” to be taken, in order to move towards their social justice horizon. The horizon is a point in the distance that recedes as you approach it but remains a constant presence to navigate towards. It is important to note that the participants do not make clear distinctions between tangible goals and social justice horizons in their interviews. They talk about their aims, their dreams, their goals, their visions, their hopes.

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<sup>9</sup> This is an *in vivo* code which emerged from the focus group discussion



When undertaking constant comparative analysis, it became clear that within these imaginings of a more equitable and just world there were both the pragmatic day to day concerns – the tangible goals of their work – as well as statements that encapsulated something beyond the pragmatic and tangible. I have separated these out (see Table 5, below) in order to understand the elements of these imaginings more deeply.

Both of these facets of imagining the future are informed by the lived experiences of the participants. They can be traced through the way that they story the past as well as the way in which they serve as a navigation aide for the young person as they make choices and perform agency in the present. In this way, the imagined future is also held as a *taonga* (treasure) in the *kete*; it provides the motivation for what they are doing.

I begin this section with an extract from the focus group participants' discussion of the metaphor of the horizon. I then present the findings in a table that allows both elements of the imagined future to be viewed holistically while also indicating the specific natures of each element. Following the table, I highlight the values that the participants identified as central to their imagined future through examples of participant voice. Within each subsection I will examine both the social justice horizons and the tangible goals evident in the narratives; I have chosen not to separate them from each other as to do so would lose the impact of the participants' imaginings.

### **Discussing the metaphor**

The metaphor of the horizon emerged as I iteratively engaged with the data. Participants spoke of their visions for the future in a way that acknowledged the challenges, scale and urgency of the social action work they are involved in, and yet they conveyed a firm belief in the ability of collective action to achieve their vision. The participants' narratives also contain an awareness that their imagined future is not firmly fixed or static, but flexible and responsive to the ever-changing contexts of their lives. It therefore made sense to conceptualise their imaginings as a horizon: an apparent point in the distance that is used to gauge the direction of navigation but one that constantly recedes as it is approached. The horizon is unattainable in the sense of being a destination point to arrive at; however, it is

entirely possible to achieve every desired destination in pursuit of the horizon, though the horizon itself keeps receding.

I presented the metaphor of social justice horizons to the participants who attended the focus group and then asked them for their feedback about how they saw their experiences and visions for the future. The following discussion about the process of the horizon and its relationship to tangible goals ensued:

*Connor: [Your experiences] definitely inform your horizon. And I guess, change your direction as well. Sometimes you've been going the wrong way, sometimes you don't only need to learn things but you need to unlearn things that you thought were right but they're not. I like the metaphor of horizon a lot.*

[Molly agrees]

*Josh: One thing about the horizon though, is that with some of us there's a tangible goal, a certain point you want to reach but with the horizon you don't reach it ever. I think that it's a good metaphor for like 'there's always something else that can be done' and that you look for the next thing, but it's almost, I don't know, it's not tangible*

*Molly: it's unattainable*

*Anya: yeah that's what I was going to say... I was almost thinking like a circle that has different parts to it, so you know like 'understanding, connections, feeling confident' and like all that other stuff and then there's a spot in the middle and that's your goal and you're moving into the circle or the circle's moving round...Just that's how I pictured it. Just cos horizon is kind of like unattainable...*

*Josh: but at the same time the horizon will change because something will happen*

*Anya: That's why I said a circle that grows or moves round*

*Connor: and I guess sometimes you do reach your horizon, that you had a few months ago, and you're there now, you've just got a new one*

*Anya: yeah, I guess*

*Rose: I feel like that everything I work on has at least an aspect of the horizon thing to it. You know, being involved in the TPPA stuff, obviously there is a very tangible goal of, or a few tangible goals, of trying to get the text*

*released and get a referendum and get the government not to sign up to it, you know. But the bigger stuff is trying to create a more democratic society where people are engaged and informed and being really listened to and having their needs met, you know as opposed to just a kind of populist democracy which is also very problematic. And I think that as much as those tangible goals can help you to kind of set you the direction you're going in, it's often for me the bigger picture goals, that are in a sense unattainable, that really motivate the work that I do a lot of the time.*

*Tim: To me it is continuous and ongoing. You know, I have a friend who I'm working with in the Rainbow sector and he says, 'you know, I'll give it 3 to 5 years' and then he's going to quit. I don't think it works like that – for me personally, when you're committing your life to the service of others or to supporting different communities it is ongoing and like you said it keeps evolving – the issues keep evolving, the people keep evolving and make changes, so you get to one particular step and there's probably ten others...you probably won't stop until you're 60 – but then people after you will come ...*

*Connor: and you need to be a flexible person for that too. I guess if you get too set in where you are going to go, then you miss stuff (voices of agreement around table)*

*Tabby: I imagine all the things that we are working towards as well, they are much bigger than ourselves. The fact that that work is going to carry on after us is something that...yeah*

*Molly: I'm just tired thinking about it (group laughs)*

*Connor: It's kind of like it's inherited almost. (yeah, totally, I agree from others)*

This lengthy extract from the focus group discussion illustrates the complexities of the young people's social justice horizons. They recognise the ambiguities, and some are more comfortable with the metaphor than others. The fact that these young people can have such a robust and insightful conversation about their social actions and the processes involved in having a vision of the future is indicative of the reflexive nature of their work. The participants really do embody what they are striving to achieve.

Taking into account all of the data from the interviews and the focus group, I have summarised the participants' imaginings in Table 5:

Table 5: The components of participants' horizons and goals when imagining the future

<b>Social Justice Horizons</b>	<b>Tangible Goals</b>
<b>Equity</b> Society that is equitable, fair, inclusive Where people feel safe and are treated with respect	Advocate for policy and law changes to address injustices
	Cultural shift: challenging deficit narratives – celebrate achievements, provide positive role-modelling
	Create safe spaces for youth and marginalised
<b>Empowerment</b> Democracy in which people, especially young and marginalised people, have a voice and are listened to Individual and collective agency strengthened	Involve young people and marginalised people in the design process of systems that affect them; authentic role in decision-making
	Create leadership opportunities
	Facilitate workshops; create art, film, media, performances
<b>Interconnected</b> Defining our purpose as one based on principles of sustainability, socialist democracy, peace	Education for sustainability approaches
	Challenge values of consumerism
	Use of relational approaches – build a culture of care
	Social enterprise business models
<b>Visionary</b> Society encourages imaginings, hopes and alternative possibilities	Greater focus on arts, creativity, critical thinking in education
	Support people with ideas for change, enable them rather than discourage, censor and constrain

The four domains of the participants' horizons as set out in the table are not intended to be firmly fixed nor seen as capable of being independent of each other. The presentation of them as such in Table 5, however, does allow for an overview of the ways in which the participants conceptualise their social justice horizons and the tangible goals associated with those domains. I elaborate on each of the domains in the following paragraphs.

### **Equity stemming from empathy**

As already stated in Part II, navigating the present, the participants overwhelmingly identified empathy as a core value to their identity and as a principle guiding their social action. This value also emerges strongly in the participants' imagined futures. They envision a society with relational values at its core: a more caring society where everyone feels safe to be their true self and can contribute positively to their community. They imagine this society where people have empathy for others and therefore treat others with compassion, respect and love. These values underpin and support the participants' deeply held beliefs that society must be equitable for all. Tim describes social justice as "giving everyone a fair

go...a chance to succeed in whatever way they define success.” This an idea that is also echoed by the other participants. They understand that equity is not the same as equality. They recognise that in order for everyone to have their rights upheld, people must be given the opportunities they need in order to access the resources they require to have their needs met. They understand that this means that some groups need more resources than other groups. Their social justice horizon embraces these complexities and they acknowledge that even though this is complex work fraught with tensions, it is work that must be done. As I argue throughout Part III of this chapter, the way in which the participants integrate pragmatic, tangible goals – small, practical steps – within their imaginings, demonstrates their conviction that the horizon of transformative change is not only necessary but possible.

The participants’ imaginings encompass individual, collective and institutional responsibilities being met. For example, Joshua sums up his vision for the future:

Joshua: *Everyone respecting each other, regardless of their beliefs. It’s like, social, financial equity. It’s trust in our government and in our councils. It’s security in our housing and security in our futures. And by education. And it’s stable, you know. That’s kind of my ideal Aotearoa. And it’s smart, yeah, smart.*

This vision speaks of relationships between individuals, groups and institutions built on respect and trust. The outcomes: equity, security and stability. Throughout the conversations I had with each participant, as well as the conversations the members of the focus group had with each other, this concept of social responsibility emerges strongly. The participants imagine a future where communities are full of people thriving.

When I asked participants to tell me how they thought this fairer, more equitable and inclusive society can be brought about, their responses included discussion of specific policy changes at localised levels, such as within schools, through advocating change to the board of trustees, to reforming the education system at the national level. They imagine a system that creates a cultural shift through the challenging of deficit narratives and the production of positive media that celebrates young and other marginalised peoples. They imagine youth, Māori, Pasifika, migrant, rainbow and disability points of view being sought out,

listened to and taken into account when policy at any level is being discussed and implemented. For example:

Tabby: *Putting more young people in leadership positions and where they can help contribute to decision making would probably help to start with*

and

Connor: *Using insider perspectives is my main solution to the injustices...And the power of personal stories in education – they're so meaningful and people take away so much from it – and people from so many cultures and communities are out there and willing to tell their stories, so why not use them? I'm so passionate about that.*

Invariably, as the participants articulated their social justice horizon, they expressed their vision in contrast to the experiences they are currently navigating and have woven into their kete from the multiple and intersecting stories of whakapapa, education and experience. One strongly recurrent theme to emerge in these contrasts is that seeking young people's voices will be an authentic and integral part of processes, not the tokenistic tick-box exercise they currently experience in so many interactions. This finding reflects the youth activism literature (see, for example Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; and Shaw et al., 2014). The participants imagine a future where people care for each other and the planet. They want a more loving society where compassion and empathy are the driving values. Significantly, they believe that it is possible for this world to exist and that their actions are able to help bring these imagined possibilities into reality.

### **Empowerment as a process and a goal**

When imagining the future, the participants' focus on empowering others is striking. They acknowledge the process of being empowered themselves throughout their lived experiences and seek to replicate and improve that process for others. As Anya, who set up a Climate Challenge workshop for 16 to 18 year olds when she was 16, concisely articulates:

Anya: *The goals of the Climate Challenge really embodies what I wanted to do, and that was: educate people about the issue, empower them to make a difference and connect them with like-minded people, and then activate – which is kind of linked in to all of those. And I feel that's like a pretty standard aim for most social justice awareness campaigns. I feel like*

*getting everyone involved in a cause is the way to solve it, and obviously get the high ups to make a big difference.*

Anya uses the language of goals and aims, but her statements allude to a much bigger vision, her social justice horizon of mitigating climate change and the injustices that come with that. Through fostering belonging and connectedness, raising awareness and people's knowledge and understanding of the issue, she believes the problem can be solved. Significantly, Anya recognises the importance of involving "the high ups" – people in positions of power – for the issues to be solved. Her vision is not for young people alone, but for a collaborative effort, an alliance involving "everyone", because climate change is an issue that requires action at multiple levels if "a big difference" is to be made.

All of the participants show an awareness of the importance of working collaboratively to achieve their goals. As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature highlights cross-age collaborations as particularly important to the success of young activists' performance of agency. The data in this study also affirms this, not only in the becoming and navigating parts of the journey, but also in the imagining. In this quote from Tabby, it is clear how the different temporal contexts (past, present and future) are intertwined in her expression of an imagined future:

Tabby: *I'd been involved a bit in Students Against Driving Drunk<sup>10</sup> at high school and seen how they have this national organisation that supports young people to run these groups and projects in their schools and just thought, wouldn't it be awesome if there was something to support young people's Queer Straight Alliances like that? So I had the idea, but at that point I think it was more a "wouldn't it be nice if somebody did that" not "I'm going to do that". I think one day me and my colleague had had a particularly frustrating day in school or something had happened, and I shared that idea with him, like wouldn't it be great if there was something like this, and he was really encouraging and was like absolutely, yes! We can do that! I think having somebody else saying that is part of that, making me think I could do it as well.*

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<sup>10</sup> Students Against Driving Drunk was a charitable organisation in New Zealand that committed to reducing risk for young people on the roads. In 2014 it changed its name to Students Against Dangerous Driving, reflecting the reality that alcohol is only one risk associated with driver behaviour.

Tabby's social justice horizon is *"a world where everybody is respected and equal and has what they need"*. In order to achieve this, she establishes a national organisation with tangible goals of supporting and empowering young people to start their own support groups in schools. It is clear from Tabby's recollections that she felt empowered to act upon her idea because of the encouragement and support of her colleague, who was in his thirties and *"had lots of connections and experience in the community sector and stuff"*. As Tabby was framing her imaginings, she acknowledged not only this particular man, but the experiences of being the youth chairperson of the board for Q Youth in Nelson and working with her local Member of Parliament, Maryan Street. Having had these experiences of empowerment herself, and being involved in other local projects that allow her to see the impact that empowering others can have on individuals as well as the community, Tabby imagines a national organisation that works within schools to explicitly empower them to set up and support Queer Straight Alliances. She then sets up a board of trustees to get it started. Tabby's experiences are indicative of the other participants in the collaborative approaches which aim to empower others on individual, collective and societal levels.

### **A sustainable future – interconnected and relational**

Every participant has particular social justice issues that they are most passionate about and their tangible goals address those specific issues while recognising how they intersect as *"stepping stones"* towards social justice horizons. In this way the participants' imagining extends beyond the work that they are involved in and acknowledges the importance of sustainable approaches and solutions. For many participants, this includes indigenous ways of knowing and being:

Adam: *[My vision is] people and community led recognition – first, recognition of the barriers that exist between us as human beings but also the barriers that exist between us and the natural world that are not only harmful to the Other but just as equally harmful to ourselves. So I guess, a breaking down of those barriers are a large part of it. So that's inter-personal but also institutional as well... I could sum it up in a slogan of maybe, "sustainable, or even resilient, inclusive and vibrant community/city". It's not really about any one thing in particular, so much as the whole of people flourishing and the land flourishing and all that...*



An example of tangible goals that fit with Adam's vision of the flourishing of people and land is the work that Henare is doing to create social housing using hemp as a building material. His team are literally creating *tūrangawaewae* (a place to stand) for the future. Hemp building blocks are sustainable and affordable and also require low-skill labour to construct so Henare and his team see it as an opportunity to solve the issues facing many young Māori in the Hawkes Bay region. The hemp housing can be built by unemployed youth while the project also provides the low socio-economic community with affordable social housing. In addition, Henare's vision includes educational outcomes for the building industry and those who seek to join it. This finding supports the literature on the importance of sustainability and having a vision in indigenous ways of knowing (Smith, 2013; Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018).

In this interconnected and sustainable future, the participants place higher value on relationships between people and the environment than the rampant consumerism which has become so prevalent in their lives. Nearly every person in the study offered a critique of capitalism and the unsustainable pursuit of economic growth over the wellbeing and welfare of people and the planet. This was expressed most explicitly by Rose and Molly and was made in connection to the point that their idea of a socially just society creates time and space for imagination and creativity.

### **The importance of having a vision**

Many participants' imaginings included that society have a vision of a more socially just world, a society that encourages imaginings and possibilities. Rose explicitly says, "*the one thing that we need at the moment is a bit more vision.*" She elaborates:

Rose: *I think that we need more of a comprehensive and or concrete ideology on the left and I do believe that left-wing progressive change is - you know, I believe in democracy - although I feel that there are a lot of problems with it at the moment - but I think that recently it's become very dominated by the right wing, dominated by neo-conservatism and neoliberalism and I think that that is fundamentally the result of the left wing....You know - neoliberalism is a very, is a very neat tidy little package. It's a neat tidy little argument. It's: 'be greedy and people will benefit, everyone will benefit. Gain, take personal gain, and eventually everyone will be rich'... it doesn't take much to, you sort of just breathe at it and it all falls over as any kind of coherent actual argument. But it, it sounds good and people like it because it gives them like ...a motivation to act in a way that is*

*straight forward and is kind of obvious, and that our whole society has increasingly become based around the values of capitalism and so it feels coherent with the lives that a lot of people are leading, you know. I think that the left needs something that I hope would be a bit more honest than that and a bit more, um [long pause] built into sustainability for people as well as for the planet. But I think that we need that. And then, I mean I could talk about a million different specific policies; but increasingly now I think that's what we need, because what we need is a cultural shift away from this intensive capitalism. And we need more inspiration: we need more ideas and more leadership in order to get there.*

Significantly, that vision critiques the society that humans have created (in the Western world at least) and the values that drive decision making and the very essence of what it is to be human. As Molly says:

Molly: *I think if we just focus more on how we as a humanity detach from consumerism and convenience and kind of evolve our collective conscience of humans, and that would take a long time, but I guess that would be my ideal society – redefine our purpose in being here*

The tangible ways in which participants think this aspect of the social justice horizon can be realised centre around education and creating opportunities for people's ideas to be heard and supported. Participants imagine a society where education has a much greater focus on the arts, creativity and critical thinking. The support that is wrapped around visions for transformative change would provide mentoring and concrete steps to enable the ideas to become reality. The finding that part of the participants' imagined future is the ability to articulate possibilities that challenge or resist the pervasive neoliberal ideology and explicit consumer-capitalist citizenship is significant and will be discussed in the next chapter through a Freirean lens.

### **Summary of imagining the future**

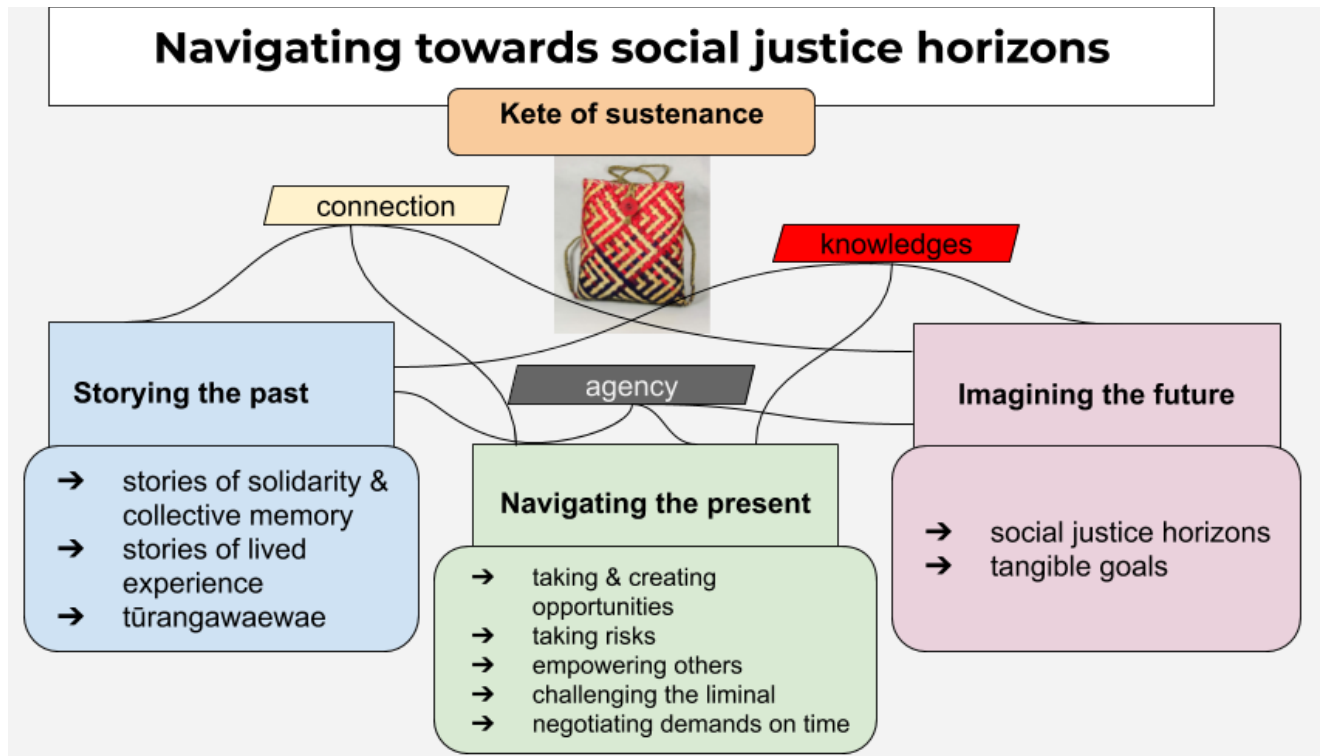
This section has presented the finding that young social activists' imagine a future with social justice values at its core. Analysing the data led to the emergence of four foundational values: equity stemming from empathy; empowerment as a process and goal; sustainability as interconnected and relational; and having a vision for/of a different way of being human and creating society. The social justice horizons of the young people move beyond the language of tolerance, as they imagine a society accepting and welcoming of all people. The

participants are highly aware of the need to embrace a more community-oriented collective agency where all people are respected and included in both policy and practice. These imaginings are woven into the young activists' *kete* and help them find direction as they navigate through their lives with purpose and hope.

### **Being and becoming: storying the past, navigating the present, imagining the future**

In this chapter I have used two metaphors to present the grounded theory of this study: *kete* as sustenance and young person as navigator. The young social activists' lived experiences and self-understandings of those lived experiences are rich and complex and the metaphors of the *kete* and social justice horizons are useful in exploring the situated contexts of the participants' experiences as well as providing insights into the processes involved in being and becoming young activists in Aotearoa New Zealand. The *kete* sustains and nourishes the young people as they navigate the present towards imagined futures with social justice horizons. Woven into the *kete* are stories of the past and stories of *tūrangawaewae* (a place to stand and a need to belong). These are powerful resources of knowledges, connections and agency for the young people to draw upon to sustain them on their journey. They also play a large role in setting the direction of navigation. The horizon metaphor captures the young activists' understandings and experiences as not an end point but as a fluid process that shifts and evolves, and requires responsive action. They are simultaneously being and becoming activists.

Figure 8: A visual summary of the properties and processes of being and becoming an activist



The navigation of the present is ever forward looking, yet inextricably bound to and with the past. This is what the *kete* represents and allows for; it provides the critical social capital so that they may navigate with knowledge and the connected, collective agency necessary to empower themselves and others. The finding that education and educating of both self and others in formal and informal settings is significant. Ultimately the stories and experiences of the young activists are of individuals collaborating with like-minded-others, and questioning and challenging people and structures which present barriers and constraints. While they are performing agency, it is clear that the agency is contextualised and situated. This chapter has demonstrated how much of the participants' agency is performed in terms of resisting social, historical and cultural norms and the expectations of them in their intersectional identities. This relationship between resistance and activist identities is examined at length in the next chapter where I enter into discussions between these findings, the literature and critical theory underpinned by Freire's critical pedagogy.

## Chapter 6 – Educative Projects: Constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship

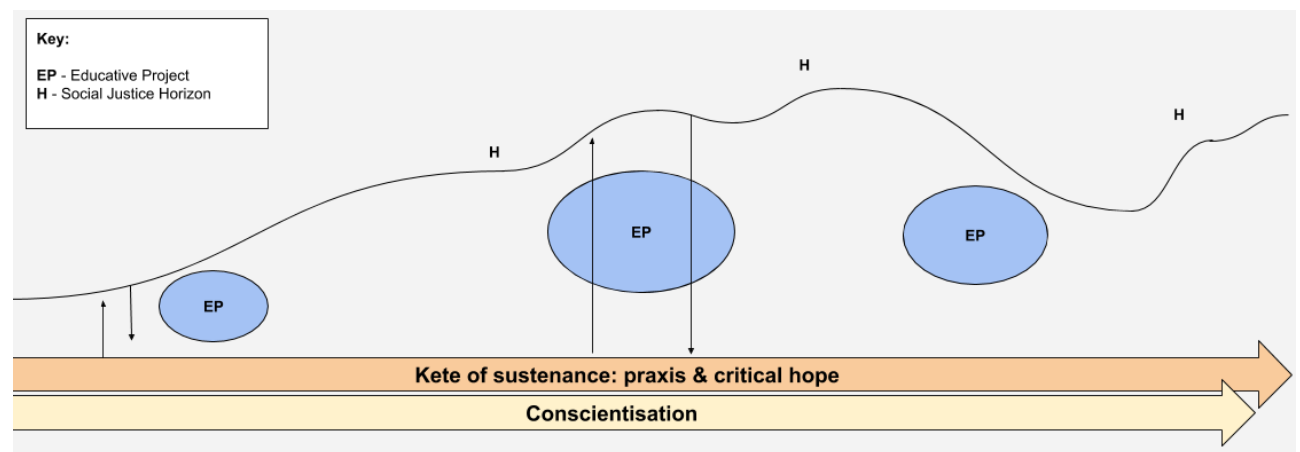
Paulo was one of the thinkers whose work gave me a language. He made me think deeply about the construction of identity in resistance. (hooks, 1993, pp.146-7)

In this chapter I use Paulo Freire’s writing to illuminate and examine how the participants’ social justice horizons are approached through “the construction of identity in resistance” in twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand. I argue that the participants’ social actions centre around the performance of *educative projects* and that these educative projects are central to the construction and performance of their activist identities. In doing so, I characterise their activism as *radically transformative citizenship*. This concept is a new and significant contribution to the fields of civic engagement and youth development research, particularly in an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

I begin by presenting a conceptual diagram (Figure 9 ) to provide a visual representation of the complex, situated and dynamic processes of being and becoming social activists. It is my contention that young activists approach their social justice horizons through educative projects. I argue that the educative projects, and their processes, embody *praxis* and I position Freire’s concept of *critical hope* as fundamental to the praxis and the social justice horizons of the young activists. Figure 9 visualises the *kete* as foundational to the educative projects; young social activists weave their lived experiences into their *kete* and it becomes a resource for them to draw upon and to sustain them, as they navigate towards their social justice horizons. The diagram depicts this process through the vertical arrows. These flow upwards from the *kete* towards the undulating solid line which represents the lived experiences of the young people; and downwards from the lived experiences to the *kete*. This metaphor helps to express the encompassing and interconnected nature of the educative projects within the construction and performance of activist identities of the young people. As I will discuss later in the chapter, these are not fixed identities, nor even identities fully embraced at all times. Ultimately, the participants exercise agency in the use of their *kete* and the performance of educative projects. This chapter argues that through

*conscientisation* young people come to know the dialectical nature of the world. Navigating *limit situations* is a key part of the dual constructing and performing processes of being and becoming an activist. I argue that by understanding the contexts in which the participants are performing radically transformative citizenship, we can be better placed to support and empower them in their work towards a radically democratic society which embraces Freire's notion of *humanisation* as discussed in Chapter 3. The reality that educative projects take place within dynamic and situated contexts is signified in Figure 9 by showing multiple social justice horizons and educative projects taking place in the young person's life. The *kete* is underpinned by the process of *conscientisation*; and both are depicted as a constant along the journey.

Figure 9: Being and becoming young social activists through educative projects



## Introducing the concept of educative projects

If the implementation of a liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none, how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution? This is a question of the greatest importance. One aspect of the reply is to be found in the distinction between *systematic education*, which can only be changed by political power, and *educational projects*, which should be carried out *with* the oppressed in the process of organizing them. (Freire, 2000, p.54, emphasis in original)

Freire's work is concerned with liberating education, but it is not limited to the formal institutions of schooling and university that are most commonly associated with learning. He was specifically concerned with literacy education for illiterate adults, education of the

popular masses in Brazil and other “third world” citizens. He was convinced that education was political and that, if the impoverished and oppressed people could read the word, they could read the world. That is, they could come to understand the reality of the world and once that reality was known they could transform it. Thus, for Freire, education was a vehicle for conscientisation. His work reminds us to look to educational projects throughout society.

In this discussion chapter, I establish that the participants’ social actions embody what I am calling educative projects. These educative projects are at the core of being and becoming social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are two key processes involved in educative projects:

- the construction of identities in resistance; and
- the performance of radically transformative citizenship.

The purpose of educative projects is ultimately to be moving communities and society as a whole towards social justice horizons which are anchored to practices of radical democracy and being more fully human. As presented in the final part of Chapter 5, the horizons are not static – they are forever receding as you navigate towards them. The role of educative projects is to facilitate the critical conscientiousness required and provide spaces and opportunities for young people to make connections, build knowledge and perform agency. I argue that in order for this to happen, young activists’ educative projects will have two core properties: praxis and critical hope. These foundational elements are represented by the thick horizontal arrows across the bottom of Figure 9.

The young activists’ educative projects must rise out of their own lived experiences and be responsive to the changing nature of those experiences and the world around them. An educative project may work well with a particular group, and yet fall flat with a different group within the same the community. It is possible that young people will be involved in multiple educative projects at the same time; or that they will be committed to one educative project for a number of years – or their entire life. The educative project is necessarily dynamic and responsive. They can take place anywhere and can be organised and facilitated by anyone. However, young people should have genuine and authentic

leadership within the educative projects, and adults will play a vital mentoring role. To be effective mentors, adults working with young people will be on their own journey of conscientisation, committed to praxis and critical hope and navigating towards their own social justice horizons.

While the substantive theory of this thesis explains the processes and contexts of the young person as an individual being and becoming an activist, the collective nature of the educative project is also important. The processes of constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship are inherently ones of individuals working alongside others towards common goals. This chapter will show that this can be achieved in a variety of ways to accommodate the strengths of individuals and their personalities. It is important that even the most introverted young people are empowered to participate in and contribute to educative projects of their choosing. Inclusion and diversity must be embraced in all respects.

### **Conscientisation – providing the strength of the *kete***

Using Freire's concept of conscientisation (2000) allows for a deeper understanding of the processes the participants are undertaking as they navigate toward their social justice horizons. As translator Myra Bergman Ramos notes in the preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "The term *conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2000, p.35). As I undertook constant comparative analysis, it became apparent that the participants were going through this process of conscientisation.

The previous chapter describes how the young people were supported, inspired and motivated by other people and events in their lives, and through the stories of others' lived experiences. Their narratives show evidence of their active intervention in the historical process; that is, they do not succumb to the fatalism of magic consciousness nor the certainty of naïve consciousness. Freire argues that magic consciousness "simply apprehends facts and attributes to them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit", while naïve consciousness "sees causality as a static, established fact...[it] superimposes itself on reality" (Freire, 2005a, p.39). The young people



in this study understand that there are causal links between phenomena in society and they interrogate those links, subjecting them to critical questioning rather than accepting them as *fait accompli*. This critical consciousness, in Freire's exposition of it, requires that the individual is consistently involved in a process of becoming aware of the relationships between social, economic and political factors and their contexts, and reflecting upon the contradictions of those relationships, taking action against the injustices they know to exist. Mike, for example, spoke with passion about the importance of people getting involved in the political process of electing councillors for the first local election following the Christchurch earthquakes<sup>11</sup>. I asked him if other young people and other people with disabilities feel the same way. He replied:

Mike: *They don't – I was speaking to someone at the Youth Awards on Friday and she doesn't see the local elections as important. She would only vote in the national elections. And I said well, maybe for other regions in New Zealand – I can't speak for other regions cos I don't live there – but I said it's extremely important for Christchurch cos we're still on this bumpy road of what the government is going to do. And there's this great video the youth MP for the East side made, and I said that Gerry Brownlee<sup>12</sup> needs to see this video because it's quite powerful of how slow things have been happening on the east side of Christchurch...Because it's a poor area. And no one cares. Those families probably don't have insurance. The government doesn't care. The roads are still like there was an earthquake yesterday. And it's quite a powerful video. It's gone round all the councillors, it's gone to the chief executive. So, it's probably going to get the pot stirring - but the pot needs to get stirred because I was visiting a friend last week in New Brighton and oh my goodness, it was so depressing! And there was still liquefaction round! Yeah, there needs to be some action taken.*

Here, Mike's educative project involves a conversation with another young person about the importance of being politically involved. Mike clearly connects the lack of local representation with the lack of action being taken to improve the lives of people in the low socio-economic area affected by the earthquake over five years before. He sees the local elections as the opportunity "to get the right councillors" so that the issues are addressed,

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<sup>11</sup> The central government had stepped in during the state of emergency and the period that followed and taken over governance

<sup>12</sup> Gerry Brownlee was appointed as Minister of Canterbury Earthquake Recovery in 2010

not only locally, but by the central government too. One of the actions that Mike supports here is the use of a video, made by a young person, to raise public awareness of the conditions in Eastern Christchurch with the aim of placing political pressure on those in power. Mike understands that the lack of action in the area is directly related to the fact that the people living there are poor. This is just one example of critical consciousness exhibited by the participants in this study.

It shows that educative projects are undertaken in simple everyday acts such as in conversation with one person, while also being performed on a much larger, wide-reaching public scale through the use of social media to bring attention to an ongoing injustice. This thesis contends that a range of actions are important and need to be recognised as such in citizenship education, civics engagement and youth development research and practice alike. By presenting young people with examples of actions that they already take part in (such as conversations about social issues that arise in rap music, or sharing Instagram posts) and showing them how these acts fit into the conscientising process, young people are empowered to construct identities in resistance. The necessary condition of conscientisation is that the young people are consciously aware of the reality of the world and its structural injustices. When students' voices are silenced by teachers removing posters of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, for example, there is a powerful opportunity to develop critical consciousness by explicitly discussing the actions of the students and the response of the teachers within the context of institutionalised schooling. The power structures have to be central in that conversation. Adults who are working with young people in these areas need to affirm the importance of the range of experiences that young people bring with them to their educative projects and help them to see how these experiences make them uniquely situated to understand the world as it truly is and take action to change it. Conscientisation must be an explicit part of any work by/with young social activists.

Freire insists that conscientisation is an ongoing process that cannot be separated from the concepts of praxis and dialogue (Freire, 2000; Shor & Freire, 1987; Roberts, 2010). The following sections discuss how these Freirean concepts can be useful in further understanding the ways in which young people navigate towards their social justice

horizons through their educative projects; and how they facilitate the dual processes of constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship.

### **Praxis: Navigating limit situations and dialogical education: challenging dominant narratives of activism**

This section of the discussion explores the *praxis* of the educative projects in detail as I examine the participants' self-understandings of activism and activist identities. Central to these understandings and processes is the dominant discourse of activist as protestor. The discourse constrains the possibilities of thought (Hall, 1992) and therefore constitutes part of what Freire calls *limit-situations*. However, the dialectical nature of the Freirean framework insists that where there is constraint, there is the potential for resistance. Conscientisation enables this potential to be realised and operationalised; it enables resistant discourses that allow for new possibilities of thought and action. As Connor says:

*Sometimes you've been going the wrong way, sometimes you don't only need to learn things but you need to unlearn things that you thought were right but they're not.*

I argue that these new possibilities – the learning and the unlearning – are a form of praxis. It is through praxis that *limit-situations* can be overcome. Significantly, the praxis of the participants in this study embodies the dialogical problem-posing education that Freire argues is the only way for liberation to occur.

Praxis is “critical reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2000, p.51). The body of Freire's work makes it very clear that praxis is the work of those who need liberating, and that it must consist of both components in order for liberation to occur. Freire argues that reflection without action is *verbalism* and action without reflection is *activism*. The fact that the neoliberal discourse casts activism as trouble-making, disruptive action that engenders violence is significant here as it essentially aligns with Freire's warnings against action for the sake of action. The two critiques, however, are motivated by very different worldviews: Freire sees activism as inadequate in the fight against oppression, while the neoliberal state uses the discourse of activism to police the behaviour of its neoliberal subjects and limit the range of acceptable forms of democratic participation in society (see Kennelly, 2011).

As Chapter 5 establishes, neoliberalism is a dominant force in the lives of the young people in this study. This is particularly in the way that they are constantly negotiating demands on their time, having to balance their desire to be involved in voluntary work with the need for paid employment, and the pressure to be high achievers in education settings so that they can “find jobs and proper income” (Connor). This finding echoes the literature Nissen (2017) reviews on the impacts of neoliberalism on young people in tertiary education in New Zealand (see p.15 of this thesis for an overview). The dominance of neoliberalism in young people’s lives is also expressed through the ways in which they are challenging the liminal positioning that the neoliberal discourse has established for them (see p.133 of this thesis). This includes the discourse of activism.

It is interesting to note, that the ways in which participants in this study define and enact their own forms of activism, they embody Freire’s notion of praxis. That is, they know that action and reflection are both required. They distance themselves from action for the sake of action. For example, Anya succinctly describes the goals of her educative project as:

*educate people about the issue, empower them to make a difference and connect them with like-minded people, and then activate*

These self-understandings provide insight into the process of conscientisation and the role that *limit situations* play in that process. As discussed in Chapter 3, limit situations are the particular set of circumstances that present real barriers to being more fully human. I first situate discourse as part of what constitutes a limit situation.

### **Discourse as limit situation**

Hall (1992) states that:

A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed. (p.165)

Furthermore, discourses “are of central importance in how people understand their own identities and place in society” (Foley, 1999, p.15). For young people this is particularly salient because the neoliberal discourse around youth citizenship, renders them liminal “citizens-in-waiting” and “incapable of independence” (Kennelly, 2008, p.30). When they do challenge their liminal positioning by acting independently and voicing their concerns in ways and spheres other than those defined and regulated by adults, they are criticised heavily in the media (Beals & Wood, 2012; Kennelly, 2008; 2011). The dominant discourse of activist as protestor provides another layer of meanings for young people taking social action to negotiate.

The following discussion provides examples of the ways in which the participants’ understandings reflect, interact with and resist these discourses as they navigate towards their social justice horizons. The relationship between holders of power and the people who do not hold power is central to the discussion. It is about how people who have diminished power in particular contexts respond to those power imbalances by dissenting rather than conforming. Dissent implies disagreeing with or withholding consent from rules, laws, or actions of a government or a group of people in power. It is essential to the function of a healthy democracy (Gordon, 2009). However, those in power (the *oppressors*, in Freirean terms) will attempt to control the dissent by establishing boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Discourse is one way that these boundaries are set up and challenging these oppressive discourses, whether blatantly or subtly, forms a significant part of young activists’ educative projects. Adults who work with young people need to recognise the power of dissent and resistance, and more importantly, empower young people to recognise it and enact it as a legitimate part of their action repertoire. This ultimately means challenging the disciplinary structures within systems that use their power to silence young people who dissent in order to maintain control by upholding dominant discourses (such as children should be seen and not heard; it would be dangerous to give 16-year-olds the vote; young people are irresponsible etc).

Freire argues that reality is socially constructed and therefore it can be reconstructed (Freire, 2000; Shor & Freire, 1987). Roberts (2000) succinctly summarises Freire’s dialectical approach to understanding the world:

Freire attempts to *think* dialectically about a reality which is dialectic...all aspects of objective reality are in motion. Objective reality encompasses both the world of nature and socially created material objects, institutions, practices, and phenomena. The world, for Freire, is necessarily unfinished and ever-evolving... As reality changes, ideas, conceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs, and so on – in short, all the products of consciousness – shift also.... Thinking dialectically involves seeking out contradictions in social reality; it implies a penetration beyond and beneath surface appearances... Thinking dialectically is, for Freire, equivalent to thinking *critically*: it means being constantly open to further questions, and to the possibility – indeed, probability – of current assumptions being revised, repudiated, or overturned. (pp. 35-7).

Given this understanding of the world, Freire would not see discourses (as part of limit situations) as fixed, insurmountable. They are limiting only in how they are perceived at that particular time and in that particular context; and can be overcome through praxis upon the reality in which they exist (Freire, 2000). Moreover, Freire emphasises that critical reflection and action are simultaneous and that “a critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate *at the present time*...[They] cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action” (Freire, 2000, p.128). The young people in this study expressed a deep understanding of this through their descriptions of their social actions, which incorporate dialogical education. For example, Connor’s assertion that he’s an activist

*through education and telling stories...challenging the bad media that gets put out constantly.*

And Nishzza’s critical reflection that the Tamil diaspora has “got access to more wealth and resources than Tamil within Sri Lanka” and so they have a responsibility to speak out and challenge the harm being done. However, the decision of when and how to speak out or take other courses of action is calculated and (re)negotiated constantly due to the situation at that point in time. Connor and Nishzza, along with a number of the other young people, are weighing the harm that may be done to themselves and others – including physical and mental; economic and reputational – if and when they take action.

Watts, Diemer and Voight’s (2011) study found that critical reflection receives the least attention in youth civic engagement research. In a New Zealand context, Wood et al. (2017) and Perreau (2015) critique the formal NCEA social studies assessment of senior students’ personal participation in social action for not explicitly requiring students to critically reflect.

Rather, students are required to reflect upon their personal involvement in the social action, reinforcing the thin, “overly individualistic forms” (Apple, 2011, p.22) of democratic participation. As such I believe that critical reflection is worth foregrounding in this discussion. To understand the process of conscientisation as Freire intended, means researchers and practitioners must pay attention to the unequivocal interconnectedness and interdependence of critical reflection and action. It is significant that the participants’ experiences encompass the spirit with which Freire conceptualises conscientisation and praxis.

When examining young people’s understandings of and attitudes toward dominant discourses through a Freirean lens, the potential for, and indeed intention of, resistance becomes even sharper. In keeping with previous studies (Fisher, 2015; Kennelly, 2008; Manning, 2010; Schuster, 2013) many of the young people in this study did not self-identify as activists. Within this study, one reason identified by several participants is that the label is associated with negatively perceived behaviours and traits: an activist is a protestor, they are loud, opinionated, lacking in self-control and ultimately not law-abiding. Such understandings can be read as evidence of a limit situation. Such perspectives are prevalent elsewhere (see Fisher, 2015; and Kennelly, 2008; 2011) and reinforce concerns that reduce the likelihood of young people engaging in certain actions such as protest for fear of it being perceived as “forceful” and “out of hand” behaviour. Their action repertoires are constrained and so are their understandings of democratic citizenship.

Simultaneously, though, this perception of activism highlights the absence of dialogue. As already established in Chapter 5, the participants highly value communication as a way of taking action, and here, in the dominant discourse of activism, communication is represented only in terms of anger and defiance; that is, it is neither constructive nor dialogical. Thus, in Freirean terms, some participants understood an activist to be a person who takes action for the sake of action, without reflection and dialogue (Freire, 2000; 2005). They then distance themselves from the identity accordingly. This does not make them conformists though. They, like all of the participants in this study, are navigating their way towards their social justice horizons in the best way they know how, and with the resources available to them in their *kete* at that point in time.

Freire's statement about the critical analysis of reality resulting in informed decision making about if, when and what action is appropriate is a reminder that conscientisation is complex and constantly occurring. The young people in this study are all in the process of conscientisation, each navigating their own limit situations in that historical moment – and in ways that may seem to conform to the neoliberal rules of engagement. This quote from Charlizza, who does not identify as an activist and does not want her work with youth to be labelled as activism, illustrates this. She intentionally distances herself from the dominant perception of the protesting activist, as she believes it would have an adverse impact on the work her team is doing:

Charlizza: *I guess I am really mindful that this, youth suicide, is, and what we do is, a little bit...it can be seen as controversial so I try my best to try and not be, so that people are more inviting to us I guess... I don't want to be seen as a disruptor or an activist, because I want our message to be welcomed and not be like, people to get upset I guess, ...and that's like all the kind of work that we do with like family violence and the youth homelessness, we tread really softly because we want our work to go as far as it can go.*

Charlizza's main concern is for the success of her work with young people and being accepted into the communities that they belong to. In her critical reflection, she identifies the context of the social action she takes as a high-risk high-stakes context and makes choices about how to best work within those contexts to achieve maximum impact to prevent Māori and Pasifika youth suicide. She is making the assumption that her understanding of the word activist is the understanding that the people in the communities she is working with will have. She belongs to these communities and is showing that she takes social action with sensitivity to their needs. She frames her identity in a way that will be accepted. She is someone who is welcomed into the community and can be trusted to bring positive change rather than stir up controversy and disruption. The dominant discourse thus constructs and constrains the way in which Charlizza understands her identity and her place in society. Yet it does not stop her from her praxis. Freire would consider this part of the dialectical tension of reality:

the dominant ideology 'lives' inside us and also controls society outside. If this domination was complete, definitive, we could never think of social transformation. But, transformation is possible because consciousness is not a mirror of reality, not a mere reflection, but is *reflexive and reflective* of reality. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.13)



Charlizza epitomizes the participants in the way that she is able to subvert the control of the discourse over her action by performing agency in a way that is acceptable to society. She is constructing an identity in resistance and she is therefore becoming more fully human in that process. Moreover, her praxis commits to the humanisation of other young people through the dialogical methods of engagement and interaction the team consciously employ as they work with young people in low socio-economic areas to develop stage productions that tell the stories of their own lived experiences of suicide, family violence and homelessness. In broadening our understanding of activism to include examples of such work as crucial activist work, the dominant discourse gets challenged and new possibilities for even broader understandings of activism are possible. Young people throughout the country (and around the world) who are engaged in grassroots community groups with goals of breaking cycles of poverty, discrimination, suicide, poor health outcomes, environmental degradation and the continuing oppression of any group of people by systemic injustice *are being and becoming* activists – even when they are purposefully not associating with that term. This thesis argues that by acknowledging all of these actions as activism we can empower young people to continue their work and better support them as they do so.

All of the young people in this study speak of their lived experiences and they relay how their work directly embraces others' lived experiences. This is a point worth reiterating, because Freire stresses that his writing is "rooted in [the] concrete situations" (Freire, 2000, p. 37) of men and women. "And it is from learning experience to learning experience that a culture of resistance is gradually founded, full of 'wiles', but full of *dreams*, as well. Full of rebellion, amidst apparent accommodation" (Freire, 1994, p.98, emphasis in original). Young people are engaged in this ongoing process of conscientisation even when it appears that they are (and perhaps they are) conforming to the neoliberal rules of engagement. It is their commitment towards their social justice horizons that ultimately determine whether their decisions constitute acts of resistance, regardless as to how *activist* those acts may or may not appear to be in the public eye. Through the praxis of their educative projects, young activists are navigating the limit situations of dominant discourses. They are constructing identities in resistance and performing transformative citizenship as they do so.

### **Acting with(in) the formal education system**

Although the majority of the participants' experiences of education have been what Freire called "banking education" rather than "problem-posing education", they seek to (re)engage with education in projects that are dialogical. That is, projects that are built on relational values of respect and care, and that value diverse voices. Tabby speaks passionately and with pride about the work that InsideOUT does:

*lots of the work we do is about supporting young people in our communities, in high schools, to lead change in our schools, in our communities...I've always been really into the idea that when you're working on something for a community, nothing for us without us, you know? Like it has to be done by that community and I think that applies a lot in youth spaces which is hard for schools as well – the idea that people making decisions, the people affected by those decisions should have a role in making them. So even at primary school, students should have a say in that.*

None of the participants hold teaching qualifications or operate within the education system in the formal understanding we have of *teacher*. However, ten of the 13 participants choose to explicitly engage with other young people within education settings such as schools and tertiary education providers. As seen in Tabby's words above, they identify these spaces as important sites of resistance building and seek to disrupt the reproduction of injustice that they have experienced themselves or been witness to. They do so in various ways: by offering their knowledges and experiences in afterschool or lunchtime programmes (at their own school while still attending as a student); as visiting facilitators who run workshops with groups of students and staff; and speaking at assemblies, for example. Two participants speak of their desire to become qualified teachers and work more fully inside the system. Those who engage in social action at tertiary institutions are in paid employment in a role of advocacy for a particular student group (Pasifika students, for example) and/or student members of such advocacy groups and other social justice-oriented clubs. Three of the participants have direct teaching roles at tertiary education institutions and consider this work an integral part of their praxis. Knowledge and action are intimately linked in the participants' understanding of education. As Henare says: "if you know something, then you can go do it... there has to be more diverse opportunities for

learning because where I'm from there aren't many opportunities apart from learning, for getting out of the situations where we are."

Being and becoming social activists within formal education spaces means navigating highly structured and long established systems that function as limit situations for young people – particularly young people who are already marginalised in some way. There is tension between the stated desire of the *New Zealand Curriculum* to educate young people so that they are "actively involved in communities" (MOE, 2007, p.13) and defining the boundaries of what it means "to contribute appropriately" (MOE, 2007, p.13). As already shown throughout this thesis, what is deemed appropriate and acceptable involvement for young people has been determined by the dominant neoliberal discourse. This study argues that where there is constraint, there is the potential for resistance. Young people are resisting and challenging dominant discourses across the country and around the world in numerous ways already. Supporting and facilitating educative projects within the formal education system is a powerful way to further empower young people to construct identities in resistance and perform transformative citizenship. It means making space for authentic leadership opportunities within classrooms, schools and lecture theatres; and it means redefining what leadership looks like within those spaces so it is less exclusive and far more inclusive. It means directly involving young people in professional development for educators so that they are partners and allies in their quest to be more fully human.

It is vital that young people are supported in developing critical consciousness within the system they seek to transform. In recognising their actions as legitimate performances of citizenship, we can further strengthen not only the young people's understanding of their importance in our society it allows for them to imagine new possibilities and to navigate towards their social justice horizons.

### **Embracing the uncertainty of praxis: the "fear of freedom"**

One of the central concerns of Freire's work is the contradiction of why the oppressed remain oppressed. The answer, he argues, lies in the dialectical reality of the world and an internal limit situation which he refers to as the "fear of freedom". In the preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he says:

Fear of freedom, of which its possessor is not necessarily aware, makes him see ghosts. Such an individual is actually taking refuge in an attempt to achieve security, which he or she prefers to the risks of liberty... Men and women rarely admit their fear of freedom openly, however, tending rather to camouflage it – sometimes unconsciously – by presenting themselves as defenders of freedom... But they confuse freedom with the maintenance of the status quo; so that if *conscientização* threatens to place that status quo in question, it thereby seems to constitute a threat to freedom itself. (Freire, 2000, p.36)

In Chapter 1, I established that the status quo and concrete reality of twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand is unquestionably neoliberal. The narratives and lived experiences of the young people in this study provide evidence of the complexities of navigating towards social justice horizons within this neoliberal status quo. They have been immersed in it since birth. As Freire describes above, the status quo provides security, and it is this concept of fear of freedom – as an internalised limit situation – that helps us to understand the different ways that the participants engage with and respond to external limit situations such as discourse. These young people are balancing their “attempt to achieve security” while in the process of conscientisation. For example, some of the participants reflected critically on the discourse of a university education as the only acceptable pathway to success and meaningful employment. They critiqued that discourse and still accepted that higher education was the way to achieve their goals. Adam, for example, spoke of how academically unfulfilling his education in high school and university was:

*I quickly got bored of it all, and continued my education myself through the internet and conversation. Unfortunately, a degree is expected of you these days, so I had to pay vast sums of money to put myself through engineering school, of which the academic component was roughly as stimulating as watching paint dry. It's no surprise that engineers as a whole have a reputation of being poor communicators, and struggle to take a multidisciplinary approach that tends to ride roughshod over local values and understandings in order to keep to the almighty code. But I got some fancy letters after my name that for some reason command respect and a good salary, so I can't complain too much.*

As we see in Adam's words here, there is pragmatism in the approach that the participants take while navigating toward their social justice horizons. To be involved in the type of work he is interested in, Adam felt no option but to complete a degree to gain the necessary qualification. The fact that our society views higher education as an investment that the student alone benefits from, means that education comes at a large financial cost to the

student. Many more examples of how the participants negotiate the expectations of society and stay true to their vision for a better society were raised in Part II of Chapter 5. Taken together, these conclusions suggest that young social activists are maintaining the status quo while engaging in praxis that seeks to challenge it. This contradiction is the reality of being and becoming an activist. It is important to recognise this fear of freedom – the internalised limit situation – as a normal and expected part of the struggle to transform society. If activists are aware of the particular forms of their own fears of freedom, they can learn to recognise them and choose to address them directly through their praxis at that moment, or not.

The finding of pragmatic responses is not unique to this thesis. A recent doctoral study of the way university students in Aotearoa New Zealand engage in politics uses the concept of “creative pragmatism” to explain the political agency and action of the participants (Nissen, 2017). The author concludes her study by stating that providing space for dissent, resistance and solidarity for university students in New Zealand would support and encourage their creative pragmatism. The participants in my study also call for such spaces in communities across New Zealand, and actively pursue solutions to injustices from within the systems that create and perpetuate the injustices. This is not to say that it negates their praxis; it merely further illustrates the ways in which conscientisation itself is not immune to the dialectical reality of the world. So while young activists’ praxis encompasses pragmatism, this study does not explain or characterise their agency and action as pragmatic. They are performing radically transformative citizenship that at points in time, in response to particular contexts and limit situations, means that they work pragmatically within the system that they seek to transform. However, as Chapter 5 establishes, there is a great deal of risk-taking involved in the participants’ lived experiences.

### **Taking risks: Challenging limit situations through communication and media**

In a later work, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (Shor & Freire, 1987), Freire and his colleague, Ira Shor, discuss the fears and risks of transformation in the context of teachers using liberating pedagogy in their classrooms. Freire speaks of his own experiences of fear and the importance of “cultivating” his fear through his lived experiences: “I treat my fear not as a ghost that commands me. I am the subject of my fear” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 61). Then,

acknowledging fear and the causes of the fear, Freire and Shor discuss the necessity of acting in spite of fear. Freire asserts that taking risks “is one of the concrete parts of the action. If you don’t command your fear, you no longer risk. And if you don’t risk, you don’t create anything. Without risking, for me, there is no possibility to exist” (1987, pp.60-1). As already discussed in Chapter 5, risk-taking emerges as a significant theme in the participants’ lived experiences. Freire understands taking risks as a necessary response to fear of freedom and a challenge to the limit situation of the participant’s lived experiences. Using this Freirean lens further strengthens the argument that through educative projects young people are engaged in conscientisation.

Furthermore, Freire connects taking risks with embracing and working with the uncertainties of the world. As Roberts (2010) states: “Uncertainty was fundamental to Freire’s epistemology, ethic, and pedagogy. Uncertainty provides the basis for investigation: for *seeking to know more*” (p.108). Thus, it is an essential attitude/ element of conscientisation. As already presented in Chapter 5, the participants in this study accept that they are on a journey which will take them into the unknown and, indeed, they seek to navigate towards this uncertainty because they have hope and can envision social justice horizons that shift and evolve as they approach them. Adam’s powerful statement that a journey is “anytime you’re letting go of your deep sense that you’ll know what’s going to happen next... letting go of your knowing” captures the spirit of Freirean thought beautifully.

This thesis contends that young activists are able to let go of their knowing and seek to know more because their lived experiences, storying and imaginings are woven through and held within their *kete* as a resource to sustain, guide and nourish them as they navigate their social justice journey. Taking risks in this context is about being open to a variety of ideas, possibilities and ways of taking action. This includes ways of conceptualising and talking about these realities. For example, Thorson (2012) argues that it is the breadth of young people’s citizenship vocabularies that matter. When asked to discuss what it means to be a good citizen, the young people in her study who could imagine the greatest range of possible fields of action (from hyperlocal to global) and the greatest range of possible actions (from individual to collective) had broader, more flexible citizenship vocabularies

which gave them the ability to choose how to participate in particular civic contexts, and at higher levels of participation than young people with narrower citizenship vocabularies. This flexibility is a recognition of the uncertainties of the world. Thorson's study also highlights the importance of discussion around conceptions of citizenship. This thesis makes a further contribution to that discussion later in this chapter in the section on critical hope and radical democracy.

Freire's work makes it very clear that resistance has a contradictory nature and it is important to acknowledge that and examine it. Giroux (2001) also stresses that neither the mechanisms of domination nor those of resistance are a coherent, static and homogenous set of practices. As already discussed in this chapter, what this means is that young people are enabled and constrained, often simultaneously, and hence the need to navigate the specific realities of their experiences as they live them. This contradiction is very apparent in the relationship between the media and young social activists. The purpose of this section is to examine educative projects as a means of risk-taking which facilitate the construction of identities in resistance and the performance of transformative citizenship. A significant element of educative projects is communicating critiques of the status quo and presenting alternatives via various media platforms.

The participants in this study showed an awareness of the role of the media in shaping and maintaining dominant discourses. To be involved with media, then, is to take risk. Tim explicitly stated that he believed "the media has construed that meaning or changed the meaning of that word [activism]". He carried on in some detail when I asked him to elaborate on the role of the media in this meaning-making. His response is both insightful and indicative of the responses that other participants had touched upon:

Tim: *I think... if the media reports on a story and they use that term activist, it changes how, I think, people will read that and respond to that... a lot of people are worried about how it is portrayed in the media, because the media is so good at what they do in terms of how they frame stories and how they anticipate audiences to respond to their stories. I mean the last thing any activist wants is to kind of have the main focus of why we are doing this activism or why we are doing this advocacy kind of swept over by the term "activist" and just "freeloading trouble makers" and you know that kind of stuff.*

Tim's point about people being worried about how their social justice work will be portrayed in the media if it is labelled as activist work has been well illustrated already by the examples of Charlizza's awareness of the need to "tread really softly" and Adam's belief that to call himself an activist wouldn't "necessarily be useful" in the work he does in his communities. This shows how effective the dominant discourse is in constructing the meaning of activist in our society, creating limit situations that young people taking social action are navigating. In making the limit situations explicit to young people, we can better empower them to take risks and engage in resisting and challenging the discourses. Moreover, Tim's critique of the media here illustrates the complex process of conscientisation. He perceives the contradictions of reality: the power that the media has to define the story while positioning itself as trustworthy, unbiased and with no interests of its own to service. His praxis, like many of the participants, includes navigating in the world of social media, creating stories and responding to mainstream perspectives that uncritically reinforce the dominant discourses and maintain what Freire calls "the ideological fog" (Freire, 2005b, p.8). In other words, for Tim, and other activists around the world, praxis entails publishing counter discourses using the media and social media platforms. The power of this praxis is seen in the rapid rise of youth-led social movements for climate justice, anti-racism, decolonisation and pro-democracy in nations on every continent (Brooks, 2017; Wright, 2019). Young people are acutely aware of the urgency of these social justice issues and they are engaging in educative projects to address them in whatever way they can.

This thesis argues that young social activists identify the power of the media and social media to have their voices heard, but also know that engaging in this public sphere of communication involves vulnerability and risk-taking, particularly in having their message misconstrued or even deliberately sabotaged. Beals and Wood (2012) found that the media in New Zealand heavily criticised young people's social action in 2006 when they walked out of classrooms to protest the low youth wage. The youth-led actions were purposefully independent of adult involvement and the authors identify this as a major reason for the media critique. The protests and activism became labelled as "truancy" and a narrative of young people being manipulated by unions dominated adult-led discussion of the action. The power of this discourse in creating a limit situation is highlighted by the fact that a



participant in my study actually recalls with frustration her school administrators' responses to the social action she was trying to organise through her school Amnesty International group at the same time as these other student-led protests. Rose's attempts to perform agency were directly impacted by the negative media surrounding other young people's action. Rose and her friend proposed for a human rights awareness campaign was to be held within school hours and involved students networking from other schools:

Rose: *...the teachers were very, like, there was no room for discussion really. You know, they had this negative experience with this other social activism thing that had been happening so they weren't willing to discuss or think about facilitating it ... I just remember them being not only not supportive of it but actively discouraging and really concerned, you know, about us essentially doing it and fucking it up, you know... There was a lot of concern from them around how that could create negative press for them, there was all of this kind of, 'Oh just do it in the school space' and that kind of stuff. [We were] really just interested in taking it outside of that space and trying to create larger opportunities for networking between different students and different schools ... so I felt a little bit as if the administrative staff at the school didn't understand and weren't willing to get behind – or at least get out of the way [laughs] – of what it was that we were actually trying to achieve.*

Just as Beals and Wood (2012) and Kennelly (2008) found in their studies, Rose experiences constraints on her action as a result of trying to perform agency “outside of that space” that had been deemed appropriate and acceptable as a good young citizen, and significantly as a good member of a school community. The teachers at the school do not want the possibility of negative media attention and use their power to prevent the student-led event. Far from being dissuaded from her pursuit of social justice actions, Rose reveals that this experience motivated her to look for alternative ways to overcome that limit situation. Using the connections, knowledges and experiences of agency in her *kete* to sustain her, she navigates the system and tells stories through film documentaries that contain important social justice messages:

Rose: *I think probably one of the biggest things that I have learnt is that...sometimes the easiest way to get things done is to do it yourself without the support of the structures that already exist essentially... by making projects that are self-funded or, you know, only have a small amount of funding or, I mean, the documentary that I have just made was crowd-funded... a lot of the work we have done is very much independent.*

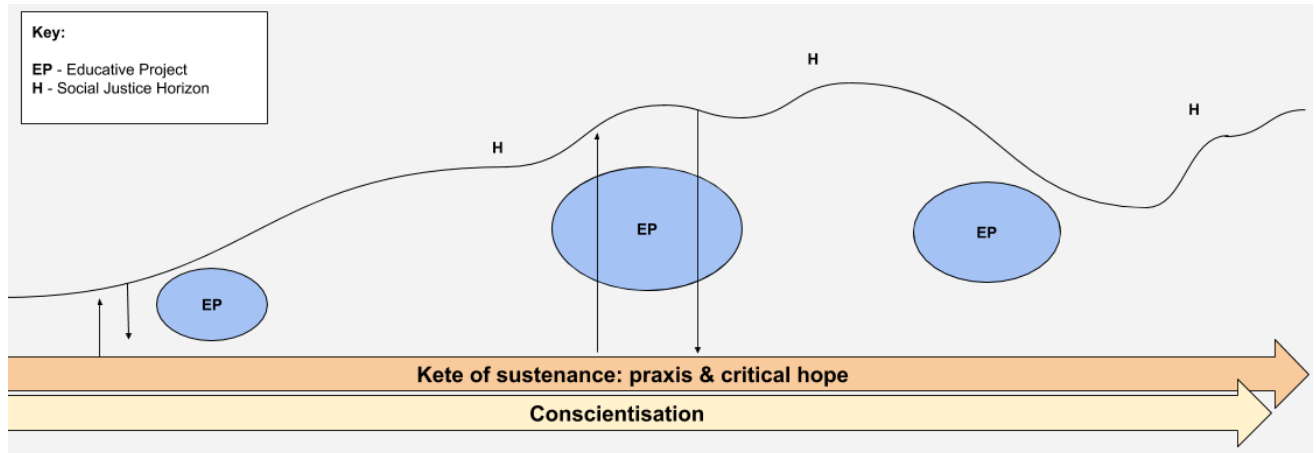
For Rose, her social justice horizon is paramount and she decides upon a course of action that will enable her to circumvent the barriers put in place by people in positions of power. However, there is contradiction present in these decisions as Rose's resistance also conforms to the neoliberal ideology of being self-sufficient. Nissen's (2017) concept of creative pragmatism comes to mind here. Freire would see this as evidence of the dialectal nature of reality as well as risk-taking and embracing the uncertainties of that dialectical world.

It is clear that there is contradiction in the relationship between media and young people. Though it is a reciprocal relationship – they use each other to gain attention and therefore readers – it is not an equal relationship. For young activists it is an uncomfortable relationship because the power to frame the actions and agency of young people lies heavily with the adult-led media agencies, as does their power to ignore stories of youth entirely unless they fit their well-established narratives of good citizen, bad activist (Kennelly, 2008; 2011) or “naughty little children” (Beals & Wood, 2012). In response to this power imbalance, young people actively create their own media, especially through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok<sup>13</sup>; and through documentary film making. This thesis argues that they do so to the best of their ability given their liminal place in society, their intersectional identities and the expectations and constraints that places upon them. Through educative projects, young people take – and create – opportunities for praxis as they navigate towards their social justice horizons and in doing so are constructing identities in resistances and performing transformative citizenship. As Figure 10 depicts, the journey will have its ups and downs, and their *kete* sustains young activists through this process of conscientisation.

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<sup>13</sup> Tik Tok emerged as an extremely popular social media platform for young people following its release outside of China in 2017. It is an application downloaded to mobile phones and is used to create short-form mobile videos. It was not mentioned by any of the participants of this study but is widely used by activists in 2020. There is a dedicated section on the website named “TikTok for good”.

Figure 10\*: Being and becoming young social activists through educative projects



### Critical hope: Radical democracy and the language of possibility

Critical hope is fundamental to the educative projects and social justice horizons of the participants. In this section, I argue that these educative projects call for and are working towards a radically democratic society (Freire, 2007; Giroux, 2003). This discussion draws attention to the importance of the everyday and the language of possibility in the performance of radically transformative citizenship and our continued understandings of being and becoming more fully human.

Henare: *you gotta have hope or you wouldn't get outta bed*

One of the key findings of this thesis is that young people taking social action are navigating towards social justice horizons. In Chapter 5, I describe these horizons as the imagined futures, the dreams and possibilities that motivate, inspire and sustain the young people's social action. Here, I argue that social justice horizons are manifestations of critical hope. Critical hope is not just expressing a wistful desire for something to be or become. It is not merely wishful thinking. It is a feeling with the weight of the belief or knowing that something better is possible: something that Amsler would describe as "the possibility of possibility" (Amsler, 2013b, p.204). Abstract and yet concrete at the same time, critical hope is the ability to imagine and dream that society does not have to be this way – a recognition that reality is only this way because people have created it be this way. Bozalek et al. (2014)

\* Figure 10 is the same as Figure 9

contend that critical hope depends upon having a flexible and open stance in and towards the world; a willingness to question and critique; to be curious about what is possible; and to imagine alternative actions.

As Giroux (1997) argues, we cannot underestimate “the importance of a language of possibility to the project of social change” (p.224). Thorson’s (2012) research gives concrete examples of how young people’s ability to imagine a broad range of possible actions within the world (their citizenship vocabularies) enable higher levels of civic participation. Critical hope, broad citizenship vocabularies and a language of possibility are essential resources for young people to weave into their *kete*. The lived experiences of young people in this study show just how powerful critical hope and the language of possibility are. Each participant articulates their imagined future as something that can be achieved, even if not in their lifetimes. They story their imaginings into the fabric of their *kete*, alongside their stories of the past. These imaginings are powerful statements of possibilities which guide the young people as they navigate the present towards their social justice horizons. They hope for a more equitable and caring society with the knowledge that such a reality is possible: they have woven the stories of successful social justice actions and campaigns into their *kete*. The storying of the past is inextricable from the imaginings of the future; both are imbued with critical hope. Indeed, I theorise that the young people’s lived experiences are evidence that “hope is an ontological need” (Freire, 1994, p.8). What this means is that the very nature of being human requires us to have hope. We cannot be (or become) without it. Freire acknowledges that hope alone is not enough to change the world, but that change nevertheless depends upon hope: “We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water” (Freire, 1994, p.8). The participants’ voices and experiences are testament to this need. Moreover, I argue that educative projects facilitate and generate critical hope for the young people involved in the activism, their whānau (families) and wider communities.

### **Tūrangawaewae: a source of critical hope**

In Chapter 5, I establish that a key finding of this study is the importance and centrality of *tūrangawaewae* as a place to stand and a need to belong. In their being and becoming, young people come to know and accept themselves and others through a connection to place and space that is physical, temporal and historical. Visualising these connections

woven into *kete* as resources to draw upon as young activists are navigating towards social justice horizons helps to highlight their importance. Here, I develop this further and argue that *tūrangawaewae* is also an ontological need. As human beings we seek out connection to places and people that enable us to know ourselves, and be(come) ourselves more fully. Through searching for these places and spaces we find connection with people and ideas, as we are social and collaborative beings who need to feel acceptance and belonging within collectives.

If young people have never experienced the security and empowerment of *tūrangawaewae* in any context, including that of storying, they are not exposed to a significant source of critical hope. Their *kete* will be weakened. The appalling outcomes for colonised indigenous peoples around the world in education, health and justice are evidence of this relationship between *tūrangawaewae* and critical hope when it is severed by oppressive structures (such ideas resonate with Smith, 2013). The reality is that oppression and injustice are the foundation of many young people's lives in Aotearoa. What this study claims is that when young people story their past (and the pasts of others) with the language of possibility and critical hope, when they navigate their present with the belief that their purpose is to strive for social justice horizons, then they are able to construct identities in resistance and perform transformative citizenship. To return to Freire's metaphor, if critical hope is the unpolluted water the fish rely upon, *tūrangawaewae* is the ecosystem that filters out pollutants and keeps the water healthy.

The relationship between resistance and *tūrangawaewae* is alluded to in Chapter 5 when I present the finding that participants' storying of the past centre around finding connection to people and places. When faced with experiences in exclusionary spaces, a number of the participants tell of making decisions to find a place where they are accepted and feel that they belong. Such performances of agency are acts of resistance, a refusal to accept the Othering discourse of exclusionary spaces, they challenge their liminality and the status quo. The challenges to these discourses are discussed in detail in the previous sections above. Here, I make the point that critical hope is infused throughout the seeking of inclusion and acceptance, in making a claim for *tūrangawaewae*, and journeying towards their social justice horizons through educative projects.

### **Empowering others provides “opportunities for hope”**

The concept of critical hope is central to Freire’s understanding of praxis. He explicitly states that it is the responsibility of progressive educators “to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacle may be” (Freire, 1994, p.9). As I have already established, the young people who participated in this study engage in progressive educator roles in pursuit of their social justice horizons. Here, I explicitly link one element of their praxis to the concept of critical hope: the desire to create opportunities for others to empower themselves.

In the third part of Chapter 5, I presented empowerment as a significant process and goal of the participants’ imaginings of the society they envisage for the future. They recognise the role that others have played in empowering their performance of agency and want to do their part in having that happen for others. This is what critical hope looks like. It is not enough for the individual to have hope. It is their responsibility to foster critical hope in others, to enable them the opportunity to imagine their own social justice horizon and support them in their navigation towards it. They know the power of collectivising hope (Nairn, 2019).

Returning to Freire’s (1994) notion of unveiling “opportunities for hope” (p.9), I argue that this is a significant part of what motivates young people to engage in the praxis of educative projects. In Henare’s words, it’s about giving people “a bit of purpose and hope.” The need for connection, knowledges and agency is expressed in that simple statement. Indeed, Freire had much to say about the connection between purpose and hope. He maintained that to be human is to be in “a permanent process of searching” (2014, p.9) because of our awareness of being unfinished beings. This searching, Freire argued, is motivated by curiosity and acts as a prerequisite for learning. Moreover, a condition of this searching for knowledge and understanding (to be more fully human) is that we do it with hope.

Crucially, hope enables dreams:

Dreaming is not only a necessary political act, it is an integral part of the historico-social manner of being a person. It is part of human nature, which, within history, is in permanent process of becoming...There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope. (Freire, 1994, pp.90-1)

I contend in this thesis that by paying attention to the connections, knowledges and agency that each young person has woven through their *kete* – the storying, navigating and imagining – we are evoking these powerful Freirean theories. When adult allies elicit and genuinely pay attention to young people’s accounts of their lived experiences, they will see that “opportunities for hope” exist in different contexts and are fostered by different people and initiatives. For example, global agreements such as the COP21; the sight of a Rainbow flag flying in school grounds; meeting other people who share the same dream for a more socially just society; being invited to attend a meeting or movie; and having religious or spiritual faith. As I present later in this chapter, these opportunities for hope are often accompanied by, or indistinguishable from, moments of resistance - the everyday performances of agency that disrupt and challenge the status quo. Indeed, educative projects are providing opportunities for hope and fostering moments of resistance while simultaneously enabling young people to navigate towards social justice horizons. They are also facilitating broad, flexible citizenship vocabularies (Thorson, 2012).

The significance of the praxis of the educative projects is highlighted by hooks’ (2003) statement:

When we only name the problem, when we state complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope. In this way critique can become merely an expression of profound cynicism, which then works to sustain dominator culture. (p. xiv)

I have established that young people being and becoming activists deeply understand what hooks is saying here. Through their educative projects they encourage other (young) people to critique the reality of the world, and simultaneously invite them to do so with a vision of how they can act so it may be transformed. Furthermore, this thesis argues that young activists understand the dialectical relationship between hope and despair. In the absence of critical hope, despair is able to take hold. When people do not believe it possible to bring change and take action upon the world in order to transform it, there is hopelessness. This is the reality. Despair and hopelessness do exist. This is where oppression and marginalisation have a hold on people. But as human beings we are curious and social beings who seek answers. There is always the possibility of resistance and struggle. As Nairn (2019) found in her study of young climate activists in New Zealand, collective processes

generate hope. For young people who construct identities in resistance, critical hope is part of their lived experience. Even when doubt and despair begin to appear, they are able to identify those doubts and fears for what they are and trust that this is not a permanent and unalterable reality. They are able to perform agency in order to overcome *limit situations*. Significantly, their connection with other people, groups and organisations who also have critical hope has fostered and cultivated their critical hope. In this way, critical hope is woven into their *kete*. They are then able to draw upon these experiences from their *kete* as they move forward with their praxis towards the goal of reaching their social justice horizons.

I agree with Bozalek et al, (2014) that critical hope is “an action-oriented response to contemporary despair” (p. 1) as well as a crucial conceptual and theoretical direction. As such, it must be part of any conversation around civics and citizenship education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Critical hope and a “language of transformation and hope” (Giroux, 1997, p. 227) are fundamental to the kind of democracy that authentically embraces the voices of all – a radical democracy. In the next section I explore what radical democracy is and discuss how the social justice horizons of the participants envisage a radically democratic society.

### **Radical democracy: socially just society**

The educative projects that radically transformative citizens commit themselves to are at heart performances of, as well as a quest for, radical democracy. The concept has been introduced in Chapter 3 of this thesis as a necessary condition for conscientisation. In brief, radical democracy embraces difference and dissent and strives for processes which result in genuinely equitable representation of all members of society. This thesis argues that young people who take part in social action for social justice in their communities are engaging in democratisation – recognising that democracy is an ongoing process rather than an end in itself. It recognises that part of the process of democracy is to challenge and create, to imagine and act in ways that seek to redefine democracy so that it is constantly working against the “foreclosure of possibility” (Amsler, 2015, p.74).



Freire maintained that tolerance is essential to democracy. Moreover, he argued that to be radical is to be tolerant, creative, life giving, open to discussion and revision of positions, and “at the service of truth” (Freire, 2007, p.83). Freire did not envisage utopia as society in which difference and conflict was non-existent. Rather, he held up the premise of *unity within diversity*: recognise the differences between groups but work in unity towards fighting the common enemy. This is the approach needed in the struggle for deep social transformation according to Freire (2007). This thesis contends that this is exactly what the educative projects of young social activists are doing.

The participants of this study know that the form of democracy that governs Aotearoa New Zealand (and most of the democratic nations of the world) does not serve the needs of all members of society. Stories and experiences of democracy not working are woven throughout their *kete* and ignite their passion for the social action of their educative projects and doing things differently. Adam, for example, speaks of the need for the flourishing of humans and nature:

*It's not really about one thing in particular, so much as the whole of people flourishing and the land flourishing*

And he recounts processes which are radically democratic as the mode of communication he employs in all spaces of his life. For example, “recognition of the barriers that exist between us...breaking down those barriers” through “coming together” and “finding that space where people can feel comfortable to express what it is they feel they need to express”.

The participants all critique people who hold positions of power. They recognise that the status quo is working very nicely for the powerful and understand that a more democratic society presents a threat to their power and position. They understand that this is precisely why the dominant discourse of democracy centres around individuals exercising their right to vote and being responsible citizens through their consumer choices. Molly questions the actual power of voting:

*if votes genuinely counted, worked, they would not allow us to do it. [Voting would] be illegal...I don't know who they are. They have a plan and they waste our time with elections and parties and pretend that they are interested in our desires...they might give some democracy and give the*

*people some power every now and again ...maintain the illusion that people have the power but I feel like it's all pre-designed.*

Molly gives voice to the distrust of the system that many of the young people articulate in their interviews. The participants critique the neoliberal discourse which limits the range of acceptable actions people may take and limits the ways that democracy itself can be conceived. In response, Adam and Molly call for radical democracy in the autonomous tradition which embraces the renewal of democracy from the ground-up grass-roots initiatives.

Ultimately, young social activists are not content with maintaining the perception that democracy is being done, and the appearance that the opportunities for consultation and representation are open and equal. The fact that the young people in this study recognise the inequities inherent within our current democracy and are constructing identities in resistance through performing radically transformative citizenship is critical hope; it is “an action-oriented response to contemporary despair” (Bozalek et al., 2014, p1). Their educative projects offer greater possibilities for humanisation.

### **Everyday performances – moments of resistance**

Freire strongly felt that the everyday had to be included in any analysis of the world – as we have seen throughout this chapter, he believed that the complex and dialectical realities had to be acknowledged and examined in order to know them and transform them. In the spoken book dialogue Freire has with Antonio Faundez (Freire & Faundez, 1998), Freire asserts:

that the starting point for political-pedagogical projects must be precisely at the level of the people aspirations and dreams, their understanding of reality and their forms of action and struggle. (p.214)

Freire (and Faundez) propose that the starting point for a political-pedagogical project is understanding the forms of resistance of the people, where they are to be found and how they find expression. The people, alongside academics, they argue, “together engage in reflection on their and our everyday life. And then they will discover for themselves their moments of resistance, how they express their resistance, the foundations they have on

which to build an ideology; and they will discover that it is they themselves who have to build it" (p.215).

The lived experiences of the participants in this study also illustrate the everyday performance of citizenship and engagement with democratisation. There were many instances where participants' narratives revealed an unease or distancing from anything to do with politics. In some cases, they could not identify their actions as political at all. When I asked Joshua if he saw his actions as political, for example, he replied:

*No, not really, yeah. I don't see it as being political. What I'm seeing in terms of my work is that I'm making my contribution... I actually wrote for the election campaign, so yeah, I was part of the thing that everyone should vote. I'm a strong believer in voting, cos I think, that we can talk and talk and talk and complain and complain and all that jazz*

However, the participants' actions were political even if they do not recognise them to be so. Part of the journey of being and becoming radically transformative citizens is the development of their critical consciousness. The participants were all at different stages in this process, and as I have shown throughout this discussion, carrying out their praxis and conscientisation is not a linear, predetermined process. It is, rather, circuitous and iterative. It is significant that these young social activists do not all see themselves as acting politically, or as being involved in politics. Researchers, educators and youth workers need to take these self-understandings into account as forms of resistance and evidence of attempts at forging counter-discourses through broader understandings of citizenship.

The lived experiences and stories that young people weave into their *kete* are full of moments of resistance. These moments of resistance form the basis of young activists' conscientisation and are a fundamental part of the *humanizing process* (Darder, 2015). As moments of resistance form counter-discourses new possibilities of thought and action emerge, and alternative ways to act within limit situations are created.

I argue that it is crucial that young people who do not see their educative projects as activist or political and are not actively involved in what would be recognised as traditional acts of citizenship in a democracy – such as voting, belonging to a political party – are nevertheless

engaging in the process of democracy which affords them the right to dissent and resist. When young people choose to work outside of the official political system to bring about change it is because this is where they see they can make a difference to people's lives. Consider the educative project of Charlizza, for example. A young Māori woman working with other young Māori and Pasifika people whose lives have been affected by suicide. She is compelled to take action and navigates towards her social justice horizon very carefully and consciously not wanting to be seen as political. It is impossible to separate Charlizza's decisions from her everyday lived experiences of a colonised and oppressed people. And, as the findings chapter makes clear, the lived experiences of others are woven throughout the *kete* that young people carry with them on their journeys of being and becoming. In this way, intergenerational trauma<sup>14</sup> must be recognised as a reality for many young people in our society, particularly Māori youth. In framing it as part of the process of constructing identity in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship I argue that we can empower young people to begin healing these traumas. Educative projects such as Charlizza's literally provide "the possibility of possibility" (Amsler, 2013b, p.204) and engage in democratisation to counter the "foreclosure of possibility" (Amsler, 2015, p.74). As such, they provide powerful staging grounds for conscientisation to be fostered and flourish.

To be a citizen in a radically democratic nation is, therefore, fundamentally about performing acts of resistance – in the everyday sense as well as in more overtly political ways - to hold government and institutions to account in a way that difference is acknowledged, celebrated and understood as a strength of humanity. These values, developed through lived experiences of critical hope and guided by the desire to reach social justice horizons, emerge prominently in educative projects.

### **Being and becoming a young social activist**

In summary, this discussion chapter has argued for a reimagining of what it means to be(come) a young activist in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have used a Freirean lens as a way of theorising how young people are being and becoming social

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<sup>14</sup> See Pihama et al. (2014) for a detailed discussion of the need to examine the intergenerational impacts of trauma on Māori through a historical trauma lens.

activists in Aotearoa New Zealand through the performance of educative projects. The conceptualisation of these educative projects as a means by which young people are constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship recognises young people as agentic and powerful. Yet, it does so without naively ignoring the contextual and situated nature of this agency. I have argued that *tūrangawaewae*, having a place to stand and feeling deeply connected to places and spaces, is an ontological need, a source of critical hope which strengthens the beings and becomings of the young activists. It allows them to feel secure in who they are so that they are able to take action and stand up for what they believe in while also helping others to do the same for themselves.

I have presented discourse as part of what Freire called the limit situation that serves to maintain the status quo; and I have examined educative projects as illuminated by Freire's argument that schools and education systems are powerful institutional limit situations when their contradictions are left unchallenged. I have argued that young activists, through their educative projects, are challenging these discourses. Education cannot be confined to the formal institutions of schools and colleges. The young people in this study have come to understand that the way to affect change is through a variety of means, involving both critical reflection and action – with an emphasis on communicating with others so that they may empower themselves. I have shown how the participants' educative projects embody a process of conscientisation that develops their ability to see the dialectical reality of the world and perform agency in ways that counter the limit situations that reality imposes upon them. The young people's praxis utilises dialogical approaches to education and critiques the status quo practices and policies of mainstream, formal institutional learning in schools, particularly in their marginalising of young people's agency to resist and call authority into account.

This chapter has shown that the young activists have instinctively been carrying out their praxis and resisting the dominant discourses regardless of whether they use the word activist to describe themselves. Choosing not to identify as an activist can be read as an act of resistance, and reminds us to be wary of what Freire called action for action's sake. The participants challenge and resist this discourse by offering broader understandings of

activism, which actually embody Freire's concept of praxis. They are, therefore, activists in their own ways. In this chapter I have proposed that this means embracing radically transformative citizenship in pursuit of radical democracy.

Although limit situations, characterised in this discussion as dominant discourses, exist as a powerful force in society, they do not completely dominate and remove the ability for young people to perform agency. This study has shown that young activists read their particular situation and, with the *kete* of their lived experiences guiding and nourishing them with critical hope, navigate towards their social justice horizons. The young people's social justice horizons are articulations of a tangible utopia, approached through performance of radically transformative citizenship in their everyday moments of resistance. Conceptualising young activists' journeys as a process of conscientisation allows for their activism to be constituted as praxis whereby the critical reflections and critical actions of young people are harnessed to empowering themselves and others to be more fully human. The Freirean concepts provide a language for us to better understand these processes and place these 13 young New Zealanders in a wider context of historical struggle without losing sight of the particular intersectionalities that make each participant's journey unique to them. This is an important contribution to research about youth activism in Aotearoa New Zealand. As we enter into a new decade of increasing uncertainties, including the very survival of humanity, there has never been a more urgent need for young people performing radically transformative citizenship to demand more radically democratic societies, here in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world.

## **Chapter 7 – Approaching social justice horizons as radically transformative citizens in Aotearoa New Zealand**

This thesis had its beginnings with my curiosity to know and understand how and why young people got involved in taking social action for social justice in their communities. Having taught so many incredibly passionate and committed young people, I was particularly interested in the role of civics and citizenship education in young peoples' experiences and self-understandings of activism. However, I did not want to situate the study in a school or any formal educational setting. I wanted to hear young people's lived experiences as situated in their lives. I was curious to know what role (if any) young activists thought education had played in those experiences. I also wanted to give young activists an opportunity to counter the "war on youth" narratives of the young person as lazy and apathetic, self-serving, self-absorbed and/or incapable which are so prevalent in the media. This resulted in a research design underpinned by social constructionist and critical theory epistemologies and using constructivist grounded theory methodology. I was unable to find examples of a research project explicitly focusing on the self-understandings of the contexts and the processes of being and becoming activists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The literature, as outlined in Chapter 2, establishes that youth activism is an important form of civic engagement and has a significant role to play in affirming personal and social identities and nurturing collective identities. It highlights the importance of building networks and intergenerational partnerships and calls for broader understandings and definitions of youth activism, civic engagement and active citizenship. In Chapter 1, I presented the argument that the dominant paradigm of youth as a transitional life stage frames young people in the liminal as citizens-in-waiting and that this view constrains their ability to perform agency while also setting the boundaries of acceptable ways to participate in and contribute to society. In concluding this thesis, I reaffirm these principles and confidently make claims about the ways in which the findings of this thesis make significant contributions to the body of work seeking to understand the processes and contexts of youth activism and youth civic engagement.

## **The transformative power of educative projects**

Education and educating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is overwhelmingly recognised as learning that takes place in formal institutions such as schools, universities and polytechnics. This study highlights the importance of recognising the powerful role that educative projects outside of the education system can play in civics and citizenship education. The lived experiences of the young people who participated in this study attest to the fact that a variety of educative projects exist in Aotearoa New Zealand and that they are transformational. The kaupapa they advocate requires that young people (as members of society who are oppressed, or marginalised) must be involved in their own emancipation. This means recognising the power of young people as agentic citizens; and it means recognising the broad range of actions they choose to take. I have illustrated how structures and discourses function as limit situations which are designed to constrain agency and I argue that in response, the participants engage in resistance and dissent in the pursuit of social justice. I conceptualise this as the construction of identity in resistance and the performance of radically transformative citizenship.

The educative projects of the young activists in this study embody praxis and embrace the process of conscientisation. They are full of critical hope, the language of possibility and creating opportunities for others to empower themselves. They recognise the importance of people knowing and loving themselves. They advocate for authentic participation in communities and insist upon being listened to and directly involved in decision making processes regarding the social issues that are important to their intersectional identities. They remind all of us that the education of young people is not confined to schools and other formal institutions of learning; it is happening in the everyday interactions that all young people have in every facet of their lives. I have argued that in understanding the contexts in which young activists are constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship, we can be better placed to support and empower them in their work towards a radically democratic society. In doing so, this thesis makes an important contribution to conversations about youth activism, civic engagement and citizenship education.



## The importance of storying

This study has shown that the stories we are told and the stories we tell are powerful contributors in constructing identities in resistance. They are woven throughout the narratives of the lived experiences as resources to guide and nourish, inspire and frame possibilities for performing activism in the present as well as setting the direction towards the social justice horizons of imagined futures. Storying is foundational to the process of conscientisation that activists are living as it constitutes counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses, providing ways of overcoming limit situations. This is important: we can facilitate the weaving of *kete* to sustain young activists by consciously including stories of possibility, stories of working to uphold social justice values and stories of overcoming injustice. Storying needs to be recognised as a significant element of the everyday interactions that families, educators, mentors, media, employers, government and non-government agencies have with young people. It is noteworthy that the storying of the participants of this study came in diverse settings and various forms including: face to face one on one conversations; social media; traditional media; art, film, music, kapa haka and poetry; group conversations; formalised presentations; and meetings with stakeholders.

I have argued that *tūrangawaewae* is a crucial component of storying. In this thesis *tūrangawaewae* is both a place to stand and a need to belong. It is about belonging and connection and feeling grounded in the knowledge and experiences of belonging and connecting. *Tūrangawaewae* is an ontological need. It enables us to be more fully human. It is at the heart of being and becoming a radically transformative citizen. These findings prompt the following important questions:

- How do we as a society nurture *tūrangawaewae*?
- How do we as educators and researchers (especially those of us who are non-Māori) centre *tūrangawaewae* in our work with young people?
- How do we empower young people to harness the power of *tūrangawaewae* as they navigate through life?

## Implications and recommendations

*What you're doing is rare for me. I don't really get many of these opportunities to be listened to. There isn't a platform. (Connor)*

This study has provided 13 young activists with an opportunity to be heard, to be listened to and to be understood in ways that many had not experienced before. This section outlines three areas in which the findings of this research have implications. I also make recommendations for further research in each of those three areas.

### **Creating new discourses of youth and activism**

When young people are supported, mentored and empowered to make meaningful contributions to their communities they are able to perform radically transformative citizenship. This study shows that adults and organisations are an integral part of the transformative journey whether they are constraining young people's ability to perform agency or facilitating it. The implications of these interactions are massive. The more adults – teachers, social workers, youth workers, policy-makers, police, employers (the list is endless) – who choose to work with young people to create spaces and opportunities for them to be heard, be listened to and have their ideas supported into fruition, the more civically and politically engaged young people will be. Their citizenship vocabularies (Thorson, 2012) will be broader and more flexible; they will have a language of possibility (Giroux, 1997).

This thesis sparks new avenues for future research to better understand these counter-discourses of youth and activism. For example, I am interested in examining the political opportunity structures available to young people in being and becoming radically transformative citizens. That is, what are the access points – both cultural and institutional – that young people can utilise “to attempt to bring their claims into the political forum” (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards & Rucht, 2002, p.62). In addition, an investigation into the discursive opportunity structures is needed to gain further understanding as to “why certain actors and frames are more prominent in public discourse than others” (p.62-3).

I believe that it would also be worthwhile examining the educative projects of young activists as forms of radical pedagogy explicitly through the lens of Giroux's theory of

resistance framework. What alternative visions of schooling might be possible through such approaches? How would this impact upon discourses of youth and activism, and therefore on youth agency?

### **(Re)defining conceptualisations of democracy**

This study highlights the need for educators, youth workers and policy makers to engage on a critical level with democracy and what it means to be a transformative citizen in a democratic nation such as Aotearoa New Zealand. We must challenge the dominant neoliberal discourses of individualistic consumer driven democracy whereby electoral politics coupled with voting-with-your-wallet constitute the ideal democratic participation (Giroux, 2004; Kennelly, 2008). We must have bold and brave conversations that allow for the (re)imagining and (re)defining of the very nature, values and processes of a democratic society. We must fund community initiatives that are collaborative and facilitate dialogue that does not always have to work towards consensus, but values dissent and disagreement as an opportunity to really listen to people's needs and to create new solutions. This work we must do includes:

- starting discussions about what radical democracy is, how it differs from current conceptualisations of democracy and what opportunities and challenges it may bring
- recognising Māori reassertion of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) as central to New Zealand's democracy (Waitoa, 2020)
- building the capacity of all who work with young people (educators, youth workers and policy makers, for example) to facilitate such discussions
- building the capacity of youth to be engaged in a radically democratic society

### **Learning from youth organising and activism approaches in formal education**

The final recommendation of this thesis will perhaps require the most struggle. The formal education system as it currently stands must be transformed. It must be open to possibilities and learn from the approaches that youth organising and youth activism programmes take. It must become more flexible and dynamic; more befitting of the essential role it plays in shaping the human beings who are compelled to be part of the system.

So what can we do differently? I recommend that further research be carried out in schools and educational spaces with overtly transformative policies and practices to explore the impact of those supportive contexts on:

- young people's agency and civic engagement
- teachers' agency and civic engagement
- impact on the agency and civic engagement of family/whānau and wider the community

Ultimately, formal education spaces and practices within those spaces need to pay greater attention to the power of storying as foundational to being human and to being able to take transformative action. By seeing young people as capable and crucial members of school communities, and treating them accordingly, we will be resisting and challenging the dominant discourses of both youth and democracy which this thesis has established as limiting and harmful.

The following reflection comes from a memo I wrote about 18 months before finishing this thesis. It makes an important contribution to the conversations raised in this study:

I have had people, friends and family, other PhD candidates, past and present colleagues question my choice in returning to the classroom after spending years in post graduate study, and working in initial teacher education. Why would I choose to move to small town New Zealand? Why would I move to low decile small school small town New Zealand? The answer: to see if I can make a difference. I sought an opportunity to put my learning and conscientisation into practice. I want to use the *kete* of my doctoral journey – the stories of participants, theorists, mentors and colleagues, interwoven with my stories and lived experience – to offer my students and colleagues opportunities and possibilities to envisage their own social justice horizons. My goal is to enable and empower the construction of identities in resistance and facilitate the performance of radically transformative citizenship.

In the few months that I have been back in the classroom, I have learned through my experiences that critical hope is what gets people from moments of despair to moments of resistance. I have been challenged on a daily basis and questioned my ability to work in a school system that requires the status quo to be upheld in order to be recognised as successful. Some days it has felt futile to even attempt to teach my classes – the behaviour of some students so consistently disruptive that little to no learning is possible. I have seen that for many young people the ability to imagine and dream other possibilities and other realities is severely limited. I know how crucial that language of possibility is and this, I have to remind myself, is the social justice horizon I am navigating towards right now. I know

that as that horizon approaches, I will set my sights on the next horizon and the one after that.

This is the language of possibility I bring to my conversations with young people. I want them to know and experience that there will be always be new horizons to work towards, that life is worth living because you have agency over that life and all the possibility that brings. I have learned that this is not an easy process when teaching in a community where many young people and the adults in their lives have no critical hope. Youth suicide is a reality for far too many families in the small community where I live and work. This final act of resistance and agency is the ultimate expression of hopelessness and despair that a language of possibility and hope seeks to counter. There can be no higher stakes than life and death.

Since writing this memo, I have actually left the classroom. This decision was partly an act of resistance, partly an act of self-care. The assessment driven spaces and structures of traditional schooling approaches offer rhetoric of qualifications and future pathways without making time and space, processes and structures that generate critical hope and enable meaningful agency. I could no longer maintain the status quo expected of the classroom teacher to confront students over incorrect uniform, and could not abide by the calls to toe the line when students were being sent home and denied their right to learning over such infringements. I challenged and resisted, and mentored student leaders to follow the necessary procedures through their Board of Trustees representative. I suggested other social actions they could take. I came up against a system designed to uphold the power of the dominant discourse that school rules must be obeyed no matter the cost to students and their families. I learnt – and my students learnt – that student voice is often tokenistic. Bringing about change takes a long time and lot of energy. I felt isolated in my efforts. I needed a support network of people willing to work with me to overcome the limit situations of the school's policies. Leaving the constraints of the education system at that particular time was necessary for me to continue navigating towards my social justice horizons and stay true to my convictions. Throughout this doctoral journey I too am being and becoming an activist constructing identities in resistance and performing radically transformative citizenship. What this experience has taught me is the importance of the collective. There can be no transformative change without transformative citizens coming together to work towards social justice horizons.

# Postscript

I leave the final words of this thesis to the incredible and inspiring young people of this study. The following is a found poem using the words of multiple participants:

## *Recommendations*

give young people more agency  
for sure  
the sense of limitation of what young people are  
capable of, what they should be  
allowed to do and  
engage with  
is incredibly frustrating

tell kids as early as possible that they are meaningful  
that they have good ideas  
that healing is possible

people flourishing  
land flourishing

change the whole industrial model of the school system  
we're teaching people to  
get credits  
not to learn

schools need to teach  
to show

you can make change  
in the community

we need diverse learning opportunities  
within the current system and outside it  
the narrative needs to change

we need a cultural shift  
away from intensive capitalism

detach from consumerism and convenience

redefine our purpose in being here  
tell stories that will inspire

people flourishing  
land flourishing

provide networking opportunities  
for young people to build around issues that

matter  
to them

make space  
for people to express their inner most beings  
connect to people  
find acceptance

collaborating and networking is important  
good mentors  
someone that's genuine

you have to have the right motivation  
seeing someone like yourself in a position of power  
a position of respect  
is really cool and  
it's really rare

redefine leadership  
provide opportunities for young people to have leadership roles  
not tokenistic tick-box leadership  
not the high-achieving fit-the-mould youth-representative  
that has no decision-making power  
no real agency

the very fact that we exist in our identity is  
a political statement

people flourishing  
land flourishing

all the things we are working towards  
are much bigger than ourselves  
that work is going to carry on after us

it's kind of like it's inherited  
it's a choice  
a duty  
a calling


if we're coming together  
it's a lot harder for  
us to be dismissed


we're just doing our part  
it's food for the soul

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Call for participants

### Advertisement/ Call for participants:

 Maria Perreau wrote on Ngā Rangatahi Toa's Timeline.  
6 May 2016, 20:07

Call for participants - do you take social action in your community? 

Kia ora,  
My name is Maria Perreau and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Auckland's School of Critical Studies in Education. My doctoral thesis seeks to document the views and experiences of young people taking social action in Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, it sets out to understand what social justice means to them, and how they go about bringing change.

I am looking for a small number of participants to join this study. So if you fit the description below, or know someone who does, please get in touch with me by email: [m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz). I'll give you more information and we can chat about what it will mean to be a participant in more detail.

I'm looking for 10-20 young people from diverse cultural, gender, educational and faith backgrounds who:

- are aged between 16 and 30 years old
- participate in social action that works towards social justice
- identify as someone who takes action for social change in Aotearoa New Zealand
- are perceived/recognised by others as someone who is active in their community as a change agent
- are resident in Aotearoa New Zealand

This is an opportunity for young people taking social action to have their voices heard with the view to influencing future policy and shaping new initiatives in citizenship education and engagement.

Please spread the word, copy and share to your heart's content!

Maria Perreau

[m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz)

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON  
02/05/2016 for 3 years. Reference Number 016/824



## Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



EDUCATION AND  
SOCIAL WORK

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Participant)

School of Critical Studies in Education

**Epsom Campus**  
Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave  
Auckland, New Zealand  
T +64 9 623 8899  
W [www.education.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz)  
**The University of Auckland**  
Private Bag 92601  
Symonds Street  
Auckland 1135  
New Zealand

**Project title:** Exploring how and why young people become social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Name of Researchers:** Maria Perreau, and her supervisors Dr Carol Mutch, and Dr Jay Marlowe.

#### Researcher introduction:

My name is Maria Perreau and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Auckland's School of Critical Studies in Education. My doctoral thesis seeks to document the views and experiences of young social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, it sets out to understand what social justice means to them and how they go about bringing change. I am looking for 10-20 volunteers from different cultural, gender, educational and faith backgrounds.

#### Project Design and Procedures:

Participation is completely voluntary. You will be offered a \$20 petrol voucher to go towards your travel costs for the first meeting.

The study is designed to have input from a small number of young people (aged 16 to 30) who take social action in their community in New Zealand. Initially, you will meet with me in a mutually agreed upon location in your town/city to discuss your views of social justice and the work that you are doing to bring change to your community. This meeting will be at some point early in 2017 and will be about an hour long. This conversation will be recorded by means of a voice recorder, but you may request that this be turned off at any stage. You may also decline to answer any question without having to give a reason. The recordings of the discussion will be converted into a transcript, concealing your identity if you wish. Transcribing will be completed by a person who has signed a confidentiality agreement.

The transcripts of the first meeting will be analysed and you will be asked to participate in making meaning of the data gathered. I may also invite you to participate in further rounds of data collection. These subsequent rounds of gathering data will be discussed with the relevant participants and they will have an opportunity to shape the design of the study, including whether it would be useful for visual elements (photographs, video, collage etc) to be included in the study; or perhaps you would like to meet with other participants in a group discussion about your experiences as activists. Any involvement in such a group would mean that concealing your identity is not possible. How much time you wish to devote to such activities, if at all, is entirely up to you. I anticipate total time commitment for participants involved in further rounds of data gathering to be about four hours.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 02/05/2016 for 3 years,  
Reference Number 016/824

A copy of previous transcripts will be provided in any follow-up meetings and you will have the opportunity to review and edit these as desired. You may decline further involvement in the study at any stage.

The audio file and transcripts will be kept securely on a password protected computer with server back-up for six years, after which they will be destroyed. You may request a copy of your audio-files by emailing me. Use and ownership of visual materials will be discussed with relevant participants if the study incorporates these in later phases.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during data gathering and for a further two weeks or until data analysis begins. You can negotiate changes relating to your contributions up until publication. At the conclusion of this study findings will be shared with all participants.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality:**

You may choose to be identified by your proper name or not. Reasons for anonymity in research are in consideration of your privacy, and that of the people in your life and communities. However, you may be comfortable with (and desire/already have) public recognition of the social action you are involved in and want to have your words and ideas attributed to you in publications that come from this study.

The researcher will take all practical steps to conceal the identity of those participants who desire it. Pseudonyms, chosen by participants, will be used on transcripts. If you choose to take part in a group discussion you cannot be anonymous. All group members will be required to keep all information shared in the group discussions confidential and will agree to this in a separate consent form (Consent Form B). It is important to realise that even if you do choose to conceal your identity, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the public nature of undertaking social action, especially in tight-knit New Zealand communities. The potential that people in activist networks know (of) each other and the small number of participants in this study also makes complete anonymity unlikely.

The opportunities for visual portfolios might produce data (photographic or video) that is potentially disadvantageous to you and/or other members of your communities (people can be embarrassed about photos and videos or worry that they will misrepresent the situation or context). If you choose to take photographs or video, you will work with Maria to ensure that those images are thoughtfully produced with the consent of the people in the images. This includes talking to them to make sure that they understand how they will be used in the study and in future publications.

Please note that if you tell Maria (verbally or through any visual elements like photos, video, drawings) about any illegal behaviour(s) she may be obliged to report this information, depending upon the seriousness of the behaviour and the possible harms to you and others. It is not the aim of this research to expose illegal behaviour.

All data will be stored on a secure password-protected computer with server back-up for six years. It will then be deleted. Any hard copies, such as consent forms, will kept for six years in a locked cabinet and then shredded.

**Dissemination:**

The results of this study will be used for my doctoral thesis and will be published as such. They may also be used in other publications or presented at academic conferences. The identity of participants will remain confidential at all times if desired and no data which could be used to identify participants will be published unless you have given your consent. I will notify you of any such publications and/or presentations if you indicate this desire by providing your contact details at the bottom of Consent Form A.

I anticipate that the findings of this project may be of interest to your communities, and we will discuss how to share findings with your wider communities throughout the research project.

**Contact Details:**

If you have any questions about this study please contact me in the first instance:

Maria Perreau, School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, Epsom Campus, Auckland 09 623 5400 m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz

My supervisors are: Associate Professor Carol Mutch, School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Ph: 09 6238899 extn. 48257. Email: c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz; and Associate Professor. Jay Marlowe, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education and Social Work, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Ph: 09 6238899 extn. 48248. Email: jm.marlowe@auckland.ac.nz

My Head of School is: Associate Professor Carol Mutch, School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Ph: 09 6238899 extn. 48826. Email: c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373- 7599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

## Appendix C: Consent Form A (Interview)



### EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

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#### **CONSENT FORM A FOR PARTICIPANTS**

**This consent form will be stored for six years.**

**Project title:** Exploring how and why young people become social activists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Name of Researchers:** Maria Perreau [m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz).  
Supervisors: Dr. Carol Mutch [c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz) and Dr. Jay Marlowe [jm.marlowe@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jm.marlowe@auckland.ac.nz)

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the researcher is conducting research with young social activists. All my questions have been answered sufficiently.

I understand that:

- My participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- I will be asked to contribute between one and four hours to this study over the course of 2016.
- This will comprise of an initial one-hour meeting, at a location agreed upon by the researcher and myself somewhere in my home town.
- The research is designed to have participants make decisions about how the study progresses. I understand that this might include:
  - being asked my ideas on shaping the design of the study
  - being asked to participate in making meaning of the data gathered
  - being asked to take part in further rounds of data collection involving me taking photographs, video or creating a visual collage; and/or meeting in a group with other participants of this study
- I may be recorded by means of a voice recorder, but I am able to request that this be turned off at any time.
- I can choose not to answer any particular question and can do so without having to give a reason.
- I can decline any invitation to take part in further rounds of data gathering.
- If I agree to take part in further rounds of data gathering, I can determine how much time to spend on such activities.
- A copy of previous transcripts will be provided in follow-up meetings and I will have the opportunity to review and edit these as desired. I may also request my audio recordings by emailing the researcher.
- I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during data gathering and for a further two weeks or until data analysis begins. I can negotiate changes relating to my contributions up until publication.

- Use and ownership of any visual material created in the study will be discussed with me.
- I will discuss the use and ownership of any visual material containing identifiable members of my community with them, and gain their consent before taking any such images.
- I can choose to be identified by my proper name or a pseudonym of my choice, but I understand that anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the public nature of social action for community change.
- Any involvement in a group discussion would mean that concealing my identity is not possible and I will be asked to sign a separate consent form before taking part in a group discussion
- The results of this study will be used for Maria's doctoral thesis. They may also be published or presented elsewhere. If I provide my contact details below the researcher will inform me of any such publications or presentations.
- The interview will be transcribed by a person who has signed a confidentiality agreement.
- The raw data and consent form will only be viewed by the researcher.
- If I disclose information (verbally or through visual materials) about illegal behaviour(s) the researcher may be obliged to report this, depending upon the seriousness of the behaviour and the possible harms to myself and others. I understand that this research does not aim to expose illegal behaviour.
- All data will be kept secure on a password protected computer with server back-up for six years, after which they will be destroyed. This consent form will be kept separate from data in a locked cabinet for six years, after which it will be shredded
- I am able to contact Maria Perreau if I have any concerns or questions about this study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part  
in this study.  
(Full name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Date)

I would/would not like to receive a summary of findings. The researcher can contact me using the following details to arrange this:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Consent Form B (Focus Group)



EDUCATION AND  
SOCIAL WORK

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### CONSENT FORM B FOR PARTICIPANTS

(For participants in focus group phase of study)

**This consent form will be stored for six years.**

**Project title:** Young social activists' conceptions of social justice and enactments for social change.

**Name of Researchers:** Maria Perreau [m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.perreau@auckland.ac.nz).

Supervisors: Dr. Carol Mutch [c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz) and Dr. Jay Marlowe [jm.marlowe@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jm.marlowe@auckland.ac.nz)

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study and understand the researcher is conducting research with young social activists. All my questions have been answered sufficiently.
- I have signed Consent Form A for the study.
- I understand that participating in a focus group means that anonymity is not possible.
- I understand that the focus group discussion will be recorded on an audio | digital recording device and will be transcribed by someone who has signed a confidentiality agreement.
- I agree to keep what is said in the group confidential.
- I understand that am able to contact Maria Perreau if I have any concerns or questions about taking part in the focus group and the study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part  
in a focus group for this study.  
(Full name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON ...02/05/2016.. for (3) years,  
Reference Number 016/824

## Appendix E: Sample Guiding Questions (Interview)

### *First meeting Question Guide:*

*NB: These questions are a rough guide as to desirable information only. The researcher intends for experiences and views to be gifted by participants in a participant-driven environment rather than requested through a structured interview. Questions are likely to be used to elicit further information/explanation on certain comments, events, or topics as they occur in the narratives of participants. Because these questions are dependent upon the narrative content within individual conversations, definitive questions are unable to be listed here.*

#### **Identity**

Tell me a bit about yourself, where you grew up, what your childhood was like.

What are your early memories of community – what does that mean to you?

Tell me about a time you became aware of wanting to help others. What was the context?

Who or what do you think has had an influence on you in your life so far?

What social issues are important to you? Why?

What groups or communities do you belong to? What role do they play in your life? Are they all social-justice oriented?

How strongly do you identify with these groups?

Do you consider yourself an ‘activist’? / Would you use the term ‘activist’ to describe yourself? Why/why not?

Are you involved in/engage with politics or political causes? What relationship do you see, if any, between politics and yourself?

#### **Agency & Efficacy**

What are your thoughts on your ability, as a young person, to bring about change in your community?

In your opinion, what skills do you have that allow you to be involved in social action? How did you learn those skills?

What support do you get? From peers? From adults?

What/who do you think motivates you in your action taking?

What are your thoughts on the individual and the collective? (in terms of ability to take action, bring about change)

Why are you interested in being involved in this study? Actions

Tell me how you came to take social action.

In what ways do you take social action/ work to bring about change in your community?

Do you think there is space for young people to be active participants in activist communities? In communities in general?

What impact does your age have on the action you take, do you think? How are actions decided upon in the work you do?

Is there a strategy in place with the actions you are part of? Whose strategy? How is it decided? What is the process involved in this strategy building?

### **Social justice**

What does a socially-just society look, feel, sound like to you?

What are your thoughts on the reasons for injustices?

How can social justice be achieved? What needs to change? How does that change get brought about?

### **Future direction of the study**

The aim of the study is to get as deep an understanding of how young people such as yourself conceptualise (think of) social justice, and how they enact social change.

Other than talking to individual participants, as we have done today, what other suggestions do you have?



## Appendix F: Focus Group Meeting Activities Plan

12.00	Welcome
12.15	<p>Begin hands activity – staging grounds  <i>Activity – A3 paper: draw around both of your hands</i>  <i>Around/inside one hand write/draw things significant to who you are – your identity and lived experiences</i>  <i>Inside the other hand write/draw things that you believe that others see as significant to your identity - i.e. take a view of yourself from the perspective of ‘other’</i></p> <p>Give 10 minutes to do the task and 15 to briefly share (2 mins each)            5 minutes to talk about anything that is raised about intersectionality or identity</p>
12.45	<p>Explain spheres  <i>Explain that the initial analysis has led me to these 3 major categories: Agency, Connection and Knowledges</i>  <i>My working theory is that each person’s lived experiences (in their staging grounds – the hands activity) and intersectionalities influence them in these 3 spheres. They’re inter-connected and inter-active.</i>  <i>Agency: (action) Communication; collaborating; working within the system; navigating challenges; critique; empowering self &amp; others; being responsive</i>  <i>Connection: (heart) Social capital; feeling connected to issue; feeling connected to place; belonging; being passionate; feeling empowered; feeling supported; (emotional responsiveness?)</i>  <i>Knowledges: (mind) feeling empowered; empowering self &amp; others; becoming expert – learning, understanding, awareness; critique; educative experiences, including embodied knowledges</i></p> <p>Anything you want to add to that?            Any gaps you can see?            Does this speak to your experiences?            What are the overlapping ideas and aspects in these spheres? Can you think of a different way to represent these interactions and their relationships with each other? (diagrammatically)</p>
13.15	<p>Social Justice horizons  <i>The third part of the emerging theory is that the lived experiences (1), which build motivation, interest, values, capabilities etc and exhibit/manifest in the interconnected spheres (connection, agency, knowledges) (2) leading to your development and actor as a social change agent/activist simultaneously – you all identify a vision and have</i></p>

	<p><i>some kind of plan (vague or very detailed). For some of you those visions are contextualised and fluid, for others they are more or less stable over a period of years.</i></p> <p><i>I am calling this vision the Social Justice Horizon. <b>Everything else is a component of (antecedent) that horizon.</b></i></p> <p><i>Horizons are always in the distance and as you approach, they recede.</i></p> <p>Does this metaphor make sense and speak to your experiences? Do you identify with this idea of horizons?  Anything you want to add to that?  Any gaps you can see with the theory?</p> <p>Activity – A3 paper. Draw the horizons of their journey as a change agent/social activist. It will help to look at your hands, can you recall times when and where you felt a shift of your horizon? Can you identify aspects of the 3 spheres (knowledges, connection, agency) in that shift? Does one more heavily affect the social justice horizon than the others? If so, is that always or only at particular times and places, or with particular people?</p>
13.45	<p>So what? Discussion</p> <p><i>How can these findings – analysing your lived experiences and developing this theory of understanding how and why you have come to where you are – be used in a meaningful way going forward?</i></p> <p><i>If we want to make a difference to more young people how do we get this into ‘the system’? Is it through social studies curriculum? Through NGOs and clubs and local govt initiatives? How do we foster the staging grounds and experiences you’ve had?</i></p> <p>There’s a lot in the NZC already about active citizenship, but doesn’t seem to be targeting social change action. Do we need a new name for the type of citizen that you embody? I’ve been reading about socially responsible citizens – moral as well as civic responsibilities  Justice-oriented citizens is another concept of the maximal type of active citizenship.  What are your thoughts on this?</p> <p>Multiple brains idea – discuss this and implications for educating young people.</p>
14.30	Participants present own work
15.00	Closing remarks

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