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# KĀTAKI Ē MAMÁ MOE HOPOHOKIA

*Perceptions and Experiences of Tongan Male Learners in Higher Education in  
Aotearoa New Zealand*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education  
at Massey University, Albany Campus, New Zealand

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I hereby affirm that this thesis represents my own research and writing, and it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been illustrated and the source information acknowledged.

**‘Olikoni Tanaki Ta‘ai**

December, 2015.

## ABSTRACT

Tongans are known as one of the greatest seafaring people, constantly and fearlessly venturing beyond the sunrise in search of new lands and new grounds to conquer and seeking better opportunities away from home. However, settlement and the adjustment and transition into a new life in the new destinations invariably come with sets of unfamiliar challenges and obstacles that demand often rather painful and difficult socio-economic acculturation.

Such is the story of the Tongan Aotearoa diaspora. Tongan migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand (A/NZ) have faced quite stringent challenges resulting in their having been largely distracted and diverted from their “New Zealand-the promised-land” dream. The Tongan experience in, and encounters with, the New Zealand education system is a standout example of the most serious of these challenges as evidenced predominantly by the lack of numeracy and literacy skills. As direct result of this gap Tongans along with, and similar to, their fellow Pasifika students are quite conspicuous amongst those seen as failures in the education system in A/NZ.

Literature shows a widening gap between policies and practises and the need to address the issue urgently. Responding to concerns about these increasing barriers, this study specifically provides ethnic gender specificity by exploring the experiences of Tongan males at higher education in A/NZ.

In my research, and as presented in this thesis, I use the Tongan methodologies of *talanoa*, *tālanga*, and *tālave* with the Kakala framework to provide comfortable space and time where the experiences, perceptions, and voices of Tongan male learners at higher education were unravelled. *Makatūkia* and *makatu‘u* were identified and discussed, and various overarching institutions such as *kāinga*, *lotu*, self and cosmos were identified to play dual roles in the failures and successes of Tongan male learners.

This research also develops and presents a new conceptual framework; *Kalia-Langimālie* which is grounded on the theoretical orientations of *tā-vā kāinga*, fashioned by the understanding that *vā* is mutual, interpersonal, and reciprocal with *tā* to represent movements, beat, and rhythms. The result of this undertaking empirically concurs that when policies and practises are grounded within, and built on, meaningful values that understand Tongans’ *tā-vā* through their worlds of self, *kāinga*, *lotu* and cosmos, success is attainable.

## DEDICATION

First and foremost, this thesis is dedicated to my parents, the late **Soane Patita Finau Tanaki Ta'ai (R.I.P)** and **'Amelia Paloti Lutui Ta'ai** who had taught me so much about life and the passion to learn and persistently struggle to succeed. *Ko ho'omo helá'eni, kuó u lava ke lava 'i'eku feingá.* I am forever indebted to you.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>APSTE</b>	<b>- Association for Pasifika Staff in Tertiary Education</b>
<b>ATLAANZ</b>	<b>- Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa NZ</b>
<b>A/NZ</b>	<b>- Aotearoa New Zealand</b>
<b>AUT</b>	<b>- Auckland University of Technology</b>
<b>CLANZ</b>	<b>- Community Learning Aotearoa New Zealand</b>
<b>EFTS</b>	<b>- Equivalent Full Time Students</b>
<b>IELTS</b>	<b>- International English Language Testing System</b>
<b>LDS</b>	<b>- Latter Day Saints</b>
<b>LMS</b>	<b>- London Missionary Society</b>
<b>MIT</b>	<b>- Manukau Institute of Technology</b>
<b>MOE</b>	<b>- Ministry of Education</b>
<b>MPIA</b>	<b>- Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs</b>
<b>MSD</b>	<b>- Ministry of Social Development</b>
<b>NZAID</b>	<b>- New Zealand Aid and Development</b>
<b>NCEA</b>	<b>- National Certificate in Education Achievement</b>
<b>NZTTSA</b>	<b>- New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Student Association</b>
<b>OECD</b>	<b>- Organisation for Economic Development</b>
<b>PAG</b>	<b>- Pasifika Advisory Group</b>
<b>PhD</b>	<b>- Doctor of Philosophy</b>
<b>PSSC</b>	<b>- Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate</b>
<b>SUTT</b>	<b>- Siasi Uēsiliana Tau’atāina ‘o Tonga</b>
<b>TEC</b>	<b>- Tertiary Education Commission</b>
<b>TEI</b>	<b>- Tertiary Education Institution</b>
<b>TLDU</b>	<b>- Teaching and Learning Development Unit</b>
<b>UNESCO</b>	<b>- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation</b>
<b>UNICEF</b>	<b>- United Nations International Children Emergency Fund</b>
<b>ZPD</b>	<b>- Zone of Proximal Development</b>

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