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**Loyalty, Commitment  
and the Corporation of Kin:  
Tonga as a Case Study.**

**A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the**

**requirements for the degree of**

**MPhil in Development Studies**

**at Massey University**

**Caroline Judith Ramsey**

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## **Abstract**

### **Kinships: Functional and Rational.**

The economic effectiveness of the Tongan kinships in a capitalist economy is dependent, to a significant degree, on the transformations and changes that are made to the way the kinship relationships function. Researchers, such as Parsons (1949), suggest there needs to be a move away from the traditional kinship relationships to individualism and nuclear families, as this is ultimately the most effective way of operating in a capitalist, business environment. However, this thesis seeks to challenge this theory by examining the changes that are occurring in kinships within Tonga. Here modifications to the kinship system seem to be allowing the family to continue to operate as an extended kinship unit both socially and economically.

This thesis endeavors to suggest that the utilisation of the kinship structure offers considerable benefits for all of those involved, and because of this there is some degree of sustainability and durability in these extended family relationships. Essentially economic decisions and resources seem to be shared between kinship members because they seek a common goal to improve the standard of living for both the family and the individual. This is reinforced by the intrinsic senses of loyalty and commitment, which encourage practical working relationships between the family members, reducing internal competition and accommodating the sharing of resources.

For the individual involved in such a system the advantages of remaining within the kinship often counter the compromises and sacrifices required. For a young member of the group the system provides security and access to resources that otherwise would have to be obtained independently, which can be particularly difficult as often the young individual lacks both the equity and experience to readily obtain these resources. For the parents who wish to pursue a career the kinship network provides caregivers and accommodation for their children, either nearby or overseas, depending on where work is obtained and where housing and educational opportunities exist for their children. As for family members with entrepreneur aspirations, the other kinship members can add

value by supporting their endeavors through their custom, their help in setting up the business, their role in establishing the right business contacts, and through their supplying of goods and services both from home and overseas. Finally for the elderly or those poor of health, the other kinship members provide an essential social welfare service, within the security of the family structure.

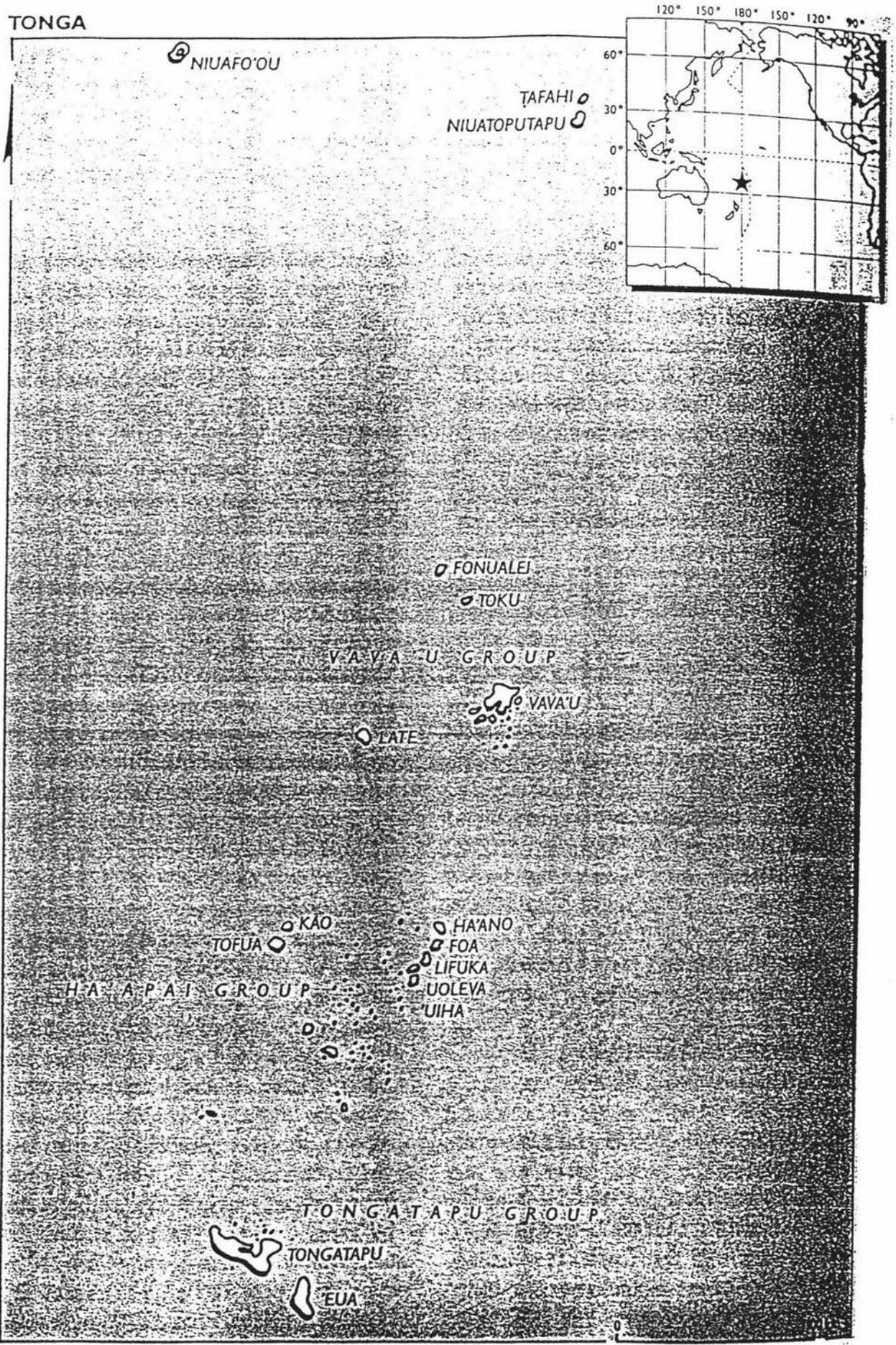
However, this kinship system, apparent in Tonga, does not survive without commitment and compromise. Family members are encouraged from a young age to acknowledge and adopt traditional ideologies and perspectives which value the kinship system and the obligations which exist within. In addition to this the Tongan people also seek an economic rationale for their involvement in the kinship network. Therefore, in moving from subsistence lifestyles to capitalism, Tongan kinships are readjusting their extent and nature of giving, their living arrangements and their attitudes towards investing and saving. These adjustments seem to be providing the kinship members, both at home and overseas, with a functional and rational economic system to work within.

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(Douglas and Douglas, 1994: 632)

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