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**Tongan Metaphors of Social Work Practice:
Hangē ha Pā kuo Fa'u'**

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements
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Abstract

This study explores Tongan social work practice and examines how social and community work is constructed from a Tongan worldview. Tongan social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand participated in individual interviews and focus group meetings which explored the Tongan values, knowledge, skills and processes foundational to their practice. The participants' narratives contribute to an understanding of Tongan conceptions of wellbeing, personal and social change and to an identification of key components of a Tongan theoretical framework for social and community work practice. This exploratory study contributes to the growing literature articulating indigenous and non-western frameworks for social and community work practice.

Seeking to draw on a Tongan interpretive framework, the thesis employs metaphors, in particular two fishing practices (*pola* and *uku*), to draw the findings together. *Pola*, a community fishing practice, illustrates a Tongan social welfare system comprised of core values, namely: *fetokoni'aki* (mutual helpfulness), *tauhi vā* (looking after relationships), *faka'apa'apa* (respect) and *'ofa* (love). Maintaining this Tongan system in the diaspora is central to the purpose of Tongan social and community work and the values themselves are a basis for practice. Other key concepts are shown to define a Tongan practice framework and these are identified as: *fakafekau'aki* (connecting), *a'u tonu* (going in person), *lotu* (spirituality/prayer/religion), *fakatōkilalo* (humility), *fie'aonga* (wanting to be useful), *matakāinga* (behaving like family) and *'osikiavelenga* (doing utmost). The *uku* metaphor draws parallels to specialised practices of fishing or diving under the reef, around *pupu'a puhi* (blowholes). Similarly, Tongan social and community work involves specific processes which draw on a constellation of skills and values. *Fakatoukatea* (skills in opposite directions) is important for bridging Tongan and *pālangi* contexts, for working across various fields of practice and for adopting family-like roles as a social worker. *Lea fakatonga* (Tongan language), *hua* (humour)

and *feongo'i'aki* (intuitive use of feelings) are important aspects of a Tongan social work approach.

Tongan social and community work is located primarily within *kāinga* (extended family) and community. This location of social work reconstructs conventional conceptions of professionalism and relationships become a key force for change within a Tongan framework. A balance between a directive and empowerment approach needs to be achieved and an advocacy emphasis is required given the position of Tongans in the diaspora.

This thesis demonstrates that a framework for social and community work derived from a Tongan worldview: provides new discourses and thinking within the critical postmodern tradition; is negotiated alongside other discourses thus creating spaces of possibility; is characterised by layers of ethnic specific, indigenous and humanity level differences and commonalities; emphasises the moral-artistic nature of social and community work; and challenges social work to be more diverse in terms of practice competencies, supervision, cross-cultural practice, education and community development. The thesis argues that if social and community work is to be transformative, it must itself be transformed and its very foundations reshaped by Tongan and other indigenous, non-western voices.

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Glossary of Non-English Terms

This glossary is arranged according to the English alphabet and includes Tongan as well as other indigenous language terms used throughout the thesis. Only brief translations are given, but it should be noted that fuller and multiple meanings can be attributed to words depending on the context.

aiga	family
akonaki	to teach, give instruction or counsel – especially moral/ religious
anga-fakatonga	Tongan way or custom
‘api	home
aū	fishing device
a’u tonu	going in person
‘eiki	superior, of high status
fa’ahinga	group, class
fahu	female head of family
faifekau	minister of religion
faifatongia	fulfilling obligations
faka’aki’akimui	to speak in a self-derogatory manner
faka’apa’apa	respect
fakafekau’aki	connecting
fakamā	causing shame, shameful, disgraceful
fakapotopoto	wise, mature, sensible
fakatōkilalo	humility
fakatoukatea	skills in opposite directions
fāмили	family
feongo’i’aki	feeling for one another
fetokoni’aki	mutual helpfulness

feveitokai'aki	respect, to be considerate
fe'ofa'aki	love for each other
fono	meeting or conference
fonua	land; afterbirth; grave
ha'a	tribe
heliaki	to speak ironically; to say one thing and mean another; metaphors
hou'eiki	chiefs
hua	humour
ifo	fantastic
kava	a plant (piper methysticum) or the beverage made from its roots
kāinga	extended family
kavenga	burden, load, responsibility
koloa	riches, wealth
koka'anga	tapa making process
lea fakatonga	Tongan language; speaking Tongan
lotu	spirituality, prayer, religion, faith
mana	supernatural, miraculous
matakāinga	behaving like family
mo'ui fakatonga	Tongan culture
ngāue	work
ngatu	tapa/bark cloth
'ofa	love; compassion
'osikiavelenga	doing utmost
pakeha	European descent
pālangi	European descent; white, Western cultures
palagi	European descent, white, Western cultures
pasifika	Pacific
pasifiki	Pacific
pō	night
pola	communal fishing practice, feast table
pukepuke fonua	holding onto the culture of the land
pupu'a puhi	blowholes
talanoa fakatātā	parables
talanoa	stories

tangata whenua	people of the land, indigenous peoples
ta'ovala	mat worn around the waist as a sign of respect
tauhi vā	looking after relationships
tauīwi	other, non-Māori peoples
tau koka	part of tapa making process
tau vau	part of tapa making process
tapu	forbidden, prohibited, sacred
tokoni	help
tuofefine	sister/female cousins of a male
tuonga'ane	brother/male cousins of a female
tu'a	inferior, of low status
tu'i	king, monarchy
uku	to dive
'ulumotu'a	male head of family
'umu'umu	depressions in the sand
vai	water, medicine
vālai	vine
whakapapa	genealogy
whanau	family