Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Tongan Metaphors of Social Work Practice:
Hangē ha Pā kuo Fa’uˊ

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in
Social Work

at Massey University
Palmerston North
New Zealand

Tracie Ailong Mafile’o

2005
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.
Acknowledgements

I humbly acknowledge the many people who have been with me on this journey and helped this work come to fruition. These brief acknowledgements make visible and celebrate the significance of your contributions.

To the Tongan social and community workers who participated in this research, you were so inspiring, giving, gracious and patient. It was an honour to listen and learn from you. I sincerely hope that this thesis speaks with integrity of your gifts of service.

I was fortunate to have three great supervisors on my team who each contributed in their own unique and special way. Associate Professor Andrew Trlin, I appreciate your father-like qualities and for having my best interests at heart throughout this project. I have benefited from your many years of experience in academia. Thank you for being so thorough in your feedback on chapter drafts – long live the red pen! Professor Robyn Munford, as second supervisor as well as my Head of School, your contribution has been unfathomable! I admire your strength-based approach to PhD supervision. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, but also for believing in me and encouraging me – it made all the difference. To Lita Foliaki, you are someone we can look up to and be inspired by. Your humility and your sharp critical analysis make for a stunning combination – thank you for stretching my thinking and for nurturing me in this project both intellectually and practically.
I thank Luseane Koloi and Lesieli Tongati’o for their assistance to set up and run the information sessions. There were several people who assisted with Tongan translation at various stages who I wish to thank: Frank Koloi translated the information sheet and consent form; Hilita Tupou transcribed and translated focus group data; and Edgar Tu'inukuafe gave Tongan language advice. Thank you to ‘Okusi Mahina and Sione Tuitahi who gave valuable critique at the analysis stage. I also thank my uncle, Uili Fukofuka, for commenting on a draft of this thesis and especially for giving me the phrase for the thesis title.

Kieran O’Donoghue, an esteemed colleague, peer reviewed a draft of the thesis. I thank you Kieran for your willingness to take on this extra work and for the insightful and helpful feedback you gave me.

I special note of thanks is due to Dr Jenny Coleman. Jenny, you have been a great mentor, you have taught me a lot and have been a fantastic support person. Also to Dr Jackie Sanders for your advice and inspiration around PhD research and thesis writing.

Thanks goes to the following people for their various contributions: Heather Hodgetts provided technical support at the final stages of the thesis; Craig Coleman graphically designed the CD that accompanies the thesis; Rouru Kapao and Teariki Engu contributed artwork for the CD; Avril Bell gave feedback on a section of a chapter; and Tasa Havea was a helpful sounding board.

Funding for research related costs was provided from several sources and I wish to acknowledge the former Ministry of Social Policy for a grant-in-aid, Massey University for a Higher Degree Award and the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Massey University for a Graduate Research Fund allocation.

In 1999 Wheturangi Walsh-Tapiata was my external professional supervisor. In this role, she had me identify professional development goals. One goal I identified was to start a PhD around 2009. Wheturangi, thank you for being a great ‘mover and shaker’ and suggesting that I could begin a PhD sooner than that! Thank you also for sharing the passion about indigenous and Pacific research and social and community work practice.
Thank you to my parents, Mohetau (Joe/Sosaia) and Margaret Mafile’o. There were many years of sacrifice for our education and this thesis simply would not have been accomplished if it were not for the firm foundation, values and vision that you instilled in us growing up. Thanks Dr Kumara, as my dad is affectionately known in family circles, for the boxes of kumara from your garden which I gave away as part of my research approach!

I wish to acknowledge my uncle, Paula Fukofuka, and the late Tapaita Fukofuka, for welcoming me into their ‘api in 1984. This experience was pivotal to the development of my passion for the topic of study.

Thank you to my wonderful husband and soul mate, Taupo Tani. You have been close to the action and supported me emotionally and practically – from comforting me when I cried on your shoulder, to peeling kumara for the focus group meetings, to letting me dominate the computer which prevented you from surfing Trade Me… and other huge sacrifices. Thank you for being “the other side of me”.

Thank you to my sister, Brenda, and brother, Daniel, for being cheer leaders! To my nieces and nephews who were around in Palmerston North at various stages during this research process (Darius, Tra’est, Jane, ‘Ofa, Litani, ‘Olita, Faipau and Misha), if you read this some day, I want you to know that your wellbeing and future was a motivating and inspiring factor. Thanks for ‘keeping it real.’

Many of you in my church family/community took on new responsibilities so that I could complete this thesis or you simply offered up your prayers – thank you for your support.

I acknowledge my Creator as the ultimate “author and finisher”, “alpha and omega”; I thank Jesus for peace that passes understanding and for being the greatest example of love. My faith has been a source of strength to me through the challenges and an expression of joy through the victories.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................... I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................... III

TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................... VII

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................. XIII

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................... XIII

GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH TERMS .............................................................. XV

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1

Journey into the Research Topic ................................................................................ 1

Scope of the Research Question .............................................................................. 3

Key Terms and Concepts ....................................................................................... 4
  Social Work and Community Work .................................................................... 4
  The Idea of ‘Tongan Social Work’ ...................................................................... 8
  Culture and Worldview ......................................................................................... 10
  Tongan Focus ....................................................................................................... 13

Structure of the Thesis ............................................................................................. 15


CHAPTER 2: CULTURE AND SOCIAL WORK: A LITERATURE REVIEW .......... 21

  Critical Postmodern Theory .............................................................................. 26

Culture and Social Work ...................................................................................... 29
  Ethnic Sensitive Practice .................................................................................... 29
  Culturally Competent Practice .......................................................................... 31
  Anti-Racist/Anti-Opressive Practice .................................................................. 34
Analysis of Culture Debates in Social Work: Anchoring Ethnic-Centred Frameworks for Practice 46
Hybridity - Essentialism 47
Indigenisation - Ethnic-Centrism 49
Cross-Cultural - Within-Culture 51
Issues - Solutions 54

Conclusion 55

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS 57

Challenges of Researching “Tongan” 57
Voice of Tongan Epistemology 57
Insider/outsider Researcher Location 59

Constructionist, Critical and Tongan Research Methodologies 60
Constructionist Approach 61
Critical Perspective 63
Tongan Methodological Approach 64

Participants 65
Participant Selection 65
Participant Recruitment 66
Access and Reciprocity 68

Data Collection and Analysis 70
Phase One: Individual Interviews 71
Time in Tonga 72
Phase Two: Focus Groups 73
Language and Translation 74
Phase Three: Individual Interviews 76
Analysis and the Process of Writing the Thesis 77

Ethics 78

CHAPTER 4: TONGAN DIASPORA 81

Colonialism 81

Post-War Migration 85

Tongans in Aotearoa New Zealand 88
Health, Education and Socio-Economic Status 88
Wellbeing and Cultural Maintenance 93

Globalisation and Tongan Transnationalism 95
Economies 97
Technologies 99
Cultures 99

Tongan Diversity 101
## Conclusion: Tongan Diaspora and the Reproduction and Transformation of Mo'ui Fakatonga......107

### CHAPTER 5: METAPHORS OF TONGAN SOCIAL WORK

- **Tongan Worldview and Tongan Social Work**...............111
  - Models, Metaphors and Meaning.................................112
  - Multiple Metaphors for Tongan Social Work Practice......115

- **Pola Metaphor: A Value and Social System Conception of Welfare**..........117

- **Uku Metaphor: Processes for Practice**..........................119

- **Kāinga (Tongan Kinship Relationships), Community and Fonua (land-people): Centring Pola and Uku Metaphors**........................................121

**Conclusion**.....................................................................127

### CHAPTER 6: VALUES OF TONGAN SOCIAL WORK

- **Fetokoni'aki (Mutual helpfulness)**..................................130
  - Fie'aonga (Usefulness)................................................134

- **Tauhi vā (Looking After Relationships)**.........................135
  - Fakafekau'aki (connecting).........................................137
  - Matakāinga (behaving like family)................................140
  - A'u tonu (to arrive in person).....................................142

- **Faka'apa'apa (Respect)**..................................................144
  - Fakatokilalo (humility)..............................................150

- **'Ofa (Love)**.......................................................................152
  - 'Oskiavelenga (doing utmost)......................................156
  - Lotu (spirituality/prayer-religion)..................................157

**Conclusion**.....................................................................160

### CHAPTER 7: FAKATOKATEA: DIVERSE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR TONGAN SOCIAL WORK

- **Fakatoukatea (Multiple and Diverse Skills)**...................164
  - Diversity of Skills across Tongan and Pālangi Contexts......164
  - Diversity of Skills across Fields of Practice..................167
  - Diversity of Skills across Family-Like Positions.............168

- **Communication**................................................................169
  - Lea fakatonga (Tongan Language)..................................169
  - Interpreting.................................................................176
  - Heliaiki (indirect communication, metaphor, symbols) and Talanoa Fakatātā (story telling)..................................................179
  - Feongo i'aki (intuitive sensing of the feelings of others)....184
  - Hua (humour).................................................................186

**Conclusion**.....................................................................188
CHAPTER 8: A TONGAN CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL WORK .............. 191

Kāinga Location of Social Work ......................................................... 191
Professional Status of Social Work ................................................. 198
Relationship between Social Worker and Client ............................. 200
The Directive and Empowerment Balance ...................................... 204
Advocacy ...................................................................................... 209
Stories of Tongan Social Work ....................................................... 214
   The Story of a Fisherman .......................................................... 214
   The Story of a Young Person ..................................................... 216
   The Story of a Group of Older People ....................................... 218
Conclusion ................................................................................... 221

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .............. 223

Aims of the Research .................................................................... 223
Summary of Key Findings: A Tongan Worldview Framework for Social Work .................................................. 224
   Metaphors as an Interpretive Framework: Pola and Uku .............. 228
Implications of Findings: Merging Waves of Knowledge..................... 230
   Making Meaning and Creating ‘New’ Discourses ......................... 230
   Negotiation .............................................................................. 232
   Layers of Difference and Commonality ...................................... 233
   Values: The Moral-Artistic Nature of Social Work ...................... 236
   Diversity Changing Social Work... “Turning Up the Volume” of the Tongan Voice ......................................... 238
   Competencies and Standards for Practice ................................... 240
   Supervision ............................................................................. 241
   Cross-Cultural Practice ............................................................ 242
   Social Work Education ............................................................. 243
   Transnational Community Development ................................... 244

Reflections on the Research Process ................................................ 245

Recommendations for Future Development and Research.................. 246
   Tongan Communities ............................................................... 246
   Social Work Practice Development ........................................... 247
   Researching Social Work Practice ............................................. 248
   Additions to the Literature ......................................................... 248

A Finishing Note ........................................................................... 249

REFERENCES ................................................................................ 251

APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION SHEET .............................................. 279
APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM ................................................................. 287

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDES ....................................................... 289
Phase One: Individual Interview Guide ........................................... 289
Phase Two: Focus Group Interview Guide ...................................... 291
Phase Three: Individual Interview Guide ....................................... 292

APPENDIX 4: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT .................................... 293

APPENDIX 5: LETTER ........................................................................ 295

APPENDIX 6: ETHICS APPROVAL (MUHEC) ....................................... 297

APPENDIX 7: RAC APPROVAL ............................................................. 298
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Competing Discourses of Human Services................................. 22
Figure 4.1 Tongan Population in Aotearoa New Zealand 1961-2001 .......... 85
Figure 5.1 Tongan Metaphors of Social Work Practice.......................... 113
Figure 5.2 Tongan Social Structure ...................................................... 120
Figure 5.3 Tongan Kinship Structure .................................................. 121

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Human Characteristics....................................................... 10
Table 2.1 Features of Formal and Informal Systems of Care and Welfare ... 51
Table 3.1 Profile of Participants......................................................... 67
Table 4.1 Globalisation: Optimistic and Pessimistic Views ..................... 94
Table 6.1 Core Values and Illustrative Values .................................... 126
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
ako\naki
anga-fakatonga
‘api
aū
a’u tonu
‘eiki
fa’ahinga
fahu
faifekau
faifatonga
faka’aki’akimui
faka’apa’apa
fakafekau’aki
fakamā
fakapotopoto
fakatōkilalo
fakatoukatea
fāmili
feongo’i’aki
fetokoni’aki

family
to teach, give instruction or counsel – especially moral/religious
Tongan way or custom
home
fishing device
going in person
superior, of high status
group, class
female head of family
minister of religion
fulfilling obligations
to speak in a self-derogatory manner
respect
connecting
causing shame, shameful, disgraceful
wise, mature, sensible
humility
skills in opposite directions
family
feeling for one another
mutual helpfulness
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tongan Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feveitokai‘aki</td>
<td>respect, to be considerate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fe’o fa‘aki</td>
<td>love for each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fono</td>
<td>meeting or conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fonua</td>
<td>land; afterbirth; grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ha’a</td>
<td>tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heliaki</td>
<td>to speak ironically; to say one thing and mean another; metaphors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hou’eiki</td>
<td>chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hua</td>
<td>humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ifo</td>
<td>fantastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kava</td>
<td>a plant (piper methysticum) or the beverage made from its roots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kā‘inga</td>
<td>extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kavenga</td>
<td>burden, load, responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koloa</td>
<td>riches, wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koka‘anga</td>
<td>tapa making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lea fakatonga</td>
<td>Tongan language; speaking Tongan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lotu</td>
<td>spirituality, prayer, religion, faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mana</td>
<td>supernatural, miraculous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matakā‘inga</td>
<td>behaving like family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mo‘ui fakatonga</td>
<td>Tongan culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngāue</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngatu</td>
<td>tapa/bark cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ofa</td>
<td>love; compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘osikiavelenga</td>
<td>doing utmost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pakeha</td>
<td>European descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pālangi</td>
<td>European descent; white, Western cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palagi</td>
<td>European descent, white, Western cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pasifika</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pasifiki</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pō</td>
<td>night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pola</td>
<td>communal fishing practice, feast table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pukepuke fonua</td>
<td>holding onto the culture of the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupu’a puhi</td>
<td>blowholes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talanoa fakatā‘a</td>
<td>parables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talanoa</td>
<td>stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Maori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tangata whenua</td>
<td>people of the land, indigenous peoples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta’ovala</td>
<td>mat worn around the waist as a sign of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tauhi vā</td>
<td>looking after relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tauuiwi</td>
<td>other, non-Māori peoples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tau koka</td>
<td>part of tapa making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tau vau</td>
<td>part of tapa making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tapu</td>
<td>forbidden, prohibited, sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tokoni</td>
<td>help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuofefine</td>
<td>sister/female cousins of a male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuonga’ane</td>
<td>brother/male cousins of a female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu’a</td>
<td>inferior, of low status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu’i</td>
<td>king, monarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uku</td>
<td>to dive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ulumotu’a</td>
<td>male head of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘umu’umu</td>
<td>depressions in the sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vai</td>
<td>water, medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vālai</td>
<td>vine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whakapapa</td>
<td>genealogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whanau</td>
<td>family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>