Kingship and Kinship

The House of Tupou, Democracy and Transnationalism in Tonga

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February 2019

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University
Declaration

Except where specific reference is made to other sources, the work presented in this thesis is solely that of the author.

Areti Metuamate
February 2019
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This thesis is dedicated to my maternal grandparents, Rongomate David Metuamate and Helen Te Ara o Rehua Metuamate (nee Tangimoana Rakatau), two people who loved their children and grandchildren unconditionally and taught us to pursue our dreams. Completing this PhD is one of mine.
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Abstract

Tongan kingship has roots in an ancient system of Tu’i (paramount ruler) that stretches back over a thousand years. The present king, Tupou VI, is the twenty-fourth Tu’i Kanokupolu and the sixth monarch of the Tupou dynasty. What has enabled these institutions to survive so long is a range of accepted social arrangements and relationships that make up an intricate kinship system that underlies the very fabric of Tongan society.

The rise of democracy, while an important modern development in Tonga’s recent political history, has not significantly affected this. Even Christianity, with its transformational impact on Tonga in the nineteenth century and beyond, was not able to shift Tonga’s deeply kinship-oriented social hierarchy.

The image often portrayed in the Western media is that Tonga is a small (read insignificant), traditional (read out-dated) Polynesian society ruled firmly by a King and his noblemen; consequently this view is one that is shared by many in Australia and New Zealand. My thesis will show that such a view is simplistic and misses a key point about the centrality of kinship in Tonga, as in many parts of Oceania.

In Tonga today, as it has been for centuries, kinship plays the essential role in determining how society is governed. While the King has a prominent role as the constitutional Head of State, to Tongans his role as Tu’i is more important because it connects him as kin to each and every Tongan person, wherever they are in the world. The role and place of the King is only possible because of the existence and continuity of a complex range of (reciprocal) practises that make up the Tongan kinship system.

This study builds on research on Tongan transnationalism, governance, history, and culture, and draws on material gathered in my fieldwork in Tonga and amongst
Tongans in the diaspora, and in over 50 interviews I undertook in Tonga, the United States, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

My research, which has a particular focus on King George Tupou V, demonstrates that the king is important to Tongans, but primarily as a part of a broader kinship system which positions him in relation to others. As an individual the king is expected to embody a range of qualities, which this study outlines as *layers of kingship*. But going one step further it will show that the king is a representation of what it means to be Tongan and his role is but one of many *layers of kinship*. The core argument developed in this thesis is that Tonga is not governed by *kingship*, but by *kinship*. 
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Acknowledgements

Ehara tuku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa taki tini. This whakataukī, or Māori proverb, acknowledges that success is rarely due to the sole work of one person, but by a person who has had many supporters. I start by acknowledging and thanking my whānau and close friends—especially my mother Selina, my late whāngai father Te Reimana (Raymond) Tuatini, my beautiful wife Jessa, my stepsons Eden and Fox, my sister Aroha and her husband Lionel Tiraa, and their children Maia and Israel, my sister Kataraina, my cousin Violet and her husband Apolosio Taulanga, and their children Davida and Xavier Stowers, ‘Oholei, Isitolo and Te Ara o Rehua Taulanga (my Tongan nieces and nephew). I thank all my aunties, uncles, and cousins, and acknowledge my Alexander family. Christine Caughey and Hugh Lusk, and their children Sam, Anabel and Harry (my Auckland whānau), and Sue Kedgley and Denis Foot, and their son Zac (my Wellington family) provided me with a great deal of support throughout my PhD journey. I acknowledge Uncle Danny and Aunty Maru Karatea-Goddard, and my goddaughter Wailan, and my mentors from Hato Paora College Pa Richard and Whaea Sandie Te Ao, as well as Principals, the late Pa Henare George (Rest in Peace), Pa Tihirau Shepherd, and Whaea Irene Pewhairangi, and my fantastic teachers and boarding staff, especially Pa Noble Rameka. I mihi to all my brothers from HPC, especially those in my year group including my cousin Tawhiti. My close friends James Coombes, Corey Te Wharau, and Mahina-a-rangi Baker, encouraged/pushed me along the way over many dinners, glasses of wine and karaoke sessions.

My ANU Pasifika PhD sisters and brothers, Marata Tamaira, Rev Latu Latai, Nikki Mariner, George Carter, Fleur Adcock, Rose Whitau, Annie Te One, Jade (Pounamu) Aikman, Salmah-Evalina Lawrence, and Maria Haenga-Collins. I mihi to each of them.
My supervisory panel was a stellar team of wonderful women with a passion for
the Pacific. Dr Rachel Morgain was a huge help in getting me to actually start writing.
Associate Professor Katerina Teaiwa is a role model and friend who I will always be
grateful to for encouraging me to do a PhD. Professor Margaret Jolly chaired my panel
and never gave up on me despite having many valid reasons to do so over the years,
with my regular changing of jobs (four times), moving home (Canberra to Sydney to
Kewarra Beach to Canberra again, and then to Armidale), time away for numerous
family occasions including funerals and my wedding in Aotearoa New Zealand, and late
delivery of promised chapters. She is one of the great scholars of the ANU and it was a
privilege to be her student. I also acknowledge her ARC Laureate team, especially
Nicholas Mortimer and Dr Carolyn Brewer, who I also acknowledge for her work as
copyeditor for this thesis.

I absolutely loved being a student at the ANU and living in Canberra and I am
grateful to my friends Luce Andrews, Professor Mandy Thomas, Lea Sublett, Professor
Aidan Byrne, and Fiona Preston for making me feel welcome there. I lived and worked
at Toad Hall and am indebted to Dr Ian Walker, Lucinda Watt, and the Toad Hall team.
As an editor of *Woroni*, I made many new friends across the ANU campus. I
particularly acknowledge my friend Fergus Hunter. I was fortunate to twice be elected
President of the ANU Postgraduate and Research Students’ Association (PARSA) and
made many friends among my peers and the dedicated staff. Diane Hutchens, Monica
Fernandes, and Wayne Joseph were great colleagues and are good friends. And I thank
my dear friends Julie Melrose, Tomas O’Kane, Nikki Mariner (again), Retna Hanani,
and Christian Beardsley for many good times.

I am deeply grateful to the many interlocutors whose insights and stories were
integral to my research. My Tongan friends ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, Fakailoatonga
Taumoefolau, Ivana Vaea, the late Falekava Kupu (Rest in Peace), and Manutuufanga
and Benjamin Naufahu supported me over and above anything I could have asked for. Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho gave me so much support from the very beginning and I have admired her work over the years that I have been researching her country and family. Lupepau‘u Tuita-Taione, Frederica Filipe, and Virginia Aleamotu‘a have become good friends and I thank them for many insights both profound, and hilarious. Crown Princess Sinaitakala Tuku‘aho and Crown Prince Tupouto‘a are also friends I made during my research and I thank them very much for their gracious hospitality. On many occasions I was able to communicate with King Tupou VI and Queen Nansipau‘u, and to interview them while in Tonga. Both of them are humble and kind people who always made time for my many questions.

My research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship of Professor Margaret Jolly FASSA Engendering Persons. Transforming Things: Christianities, Commodities and Individualism in Oceania (FL100100196). I also acknowledge the Tongan Government for allowing me to undertake research in their country. Finally, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which ANU is situated – every day I have walked on your land has been a privilege for me. Tēnā rā koutou katoa.
I have tried to explain Tongan words as I use them throughout the thesis but am conscious that there are sometimes different interpretations on the meaning of a word, something I know and understand in my own native language, *te reo Māori*. An example is the word ‘*Eiki*, which traditionally meant chief, but in today’s usage it refers to chief or person of chiefly descent, as well as noble, and it is also used when addressing a Minister of the Crown (e.g. ‘*Eiki Minista*).

In keeping with contemporary orthographic conventions, I use diacritical markers, including the glottal stop (e.g. Taufa‘āhau) and the macron (e.g. *kāinga*). However, where these markers are not included in the sources I cite, I defer to the original.

Tongan nobles’ names have their own convention with the noble ‘title’ and ‘name’ being the same thing. When a noble dies and his son (or brother, or grandson) succeeds him, the successor takes on his noble title (which is also a name) as his own and relinquishes the use of his previous names. For example, in 2014 when the Noble Fusitu'a (who I interviewed for this thesis in December 2012) died, his son Mata‘i‘ulu Fonuamotu Fusitu'a became simply Fusitu'a (often referred to as Lord Fusitu'a) and no longer goes by the name Mata‘i‘ulu. This can often be confusing for researchers because, as is the case with this thesis, there may be times when both the father and son are referred to, or quoted, in a document at a time when they each held the title/name. In my thesis, I have added contextual information when referring to, or quoting, either of these two Fusitu'a so that the reader can determine which one is being referred to.

In most chapters I will use the full name of a person the first time, and then the shorter version they are known by thus: King George Tupou V, to Tupou V and Princess Sālote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita, to Princess Pilolevu.
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## Glossaries

### Tongan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘afio</td>
<td>majesty (His or Her Majesty when referring to the reigning monarch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘api</td>
<td>home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anga Fakapalangi</td>
<td>the Western/European way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anga Fakatonga</td>
<td>the Tongan way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘eiki</td>
<td>chiefly or royal person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fahu</td>
<td>superior person (usually woman or direct descendant of a senior woman) of one’s father’s line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ha‘a</td>
<td>race, tribe, clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hau</td>
<td>political champion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hohoko</td>
<td>genealogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hou ‘eiki</td>
<td>chiefs, royals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kāinga</td>
<td>family, kin group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kafa</td>
<td>rope/cord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiekie</td>
<td>girdle worn around the waist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koloa</td>
<td>traditional gift offerings, possessions, wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kumala</td>
<td>sweet potato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lakalaka</td>
<td>formal type of dance, referred to as the national dance style of Tonga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>langi</td>
<td>face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lotu</td>
<td>prayer, pray, worship, religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mana</td>
<td>spiritual power, prestige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mehekitanga</td>
<td>paternal aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngatu</td>
<td>bark cloth (more broadly referred to as tapa in the Pacific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nōpele</td>
<td>noble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ofa</td>
<td>love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palangi</td>
<td>a foreigner (to Tonga), usually with a white-skinned appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td><strong>Māori</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>palasi</em></td>
<td><em>mihi</em> a greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>puaka</em></td>
<td><em>hui</em> meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Siasi</em></td>
<td><em>Kīngitanga</em> Māori <em>King movement</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ta’ovala</em></td>
<td><em>kohanga</em> gift, acknowledgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tu’a</em></td>
<td><em>kuia</em> grandmother, elderly woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tu’i</em></td>
<td><em>mana</em> the divine status, position, authority or power inherent in every person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>mihi</em> greeting, acknowledgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>pākehā</em> New Zealander of European descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>pepeha</em> tribal saying, proverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>tapu</em> sacred, holy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Te Moananui a Kiwa</em> the great Pacific Ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>whakataukī</em> Māori proverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>whānau</em> family, extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>whāngai</em> adopted, fostered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Titles and Styles of the Tongan Nobility and Royalty

Throughout this thesis are references to titles of positions and styles of address that are not widely used in the typical Australian or New Zealand daily contexts. To assist the reader I have noted each of these and provided a brief definition or explanation of the meaning. Where Tongan titles are used in the thesis, I have explained the meaning of these as they arise and provided a list as below.

Baron – a title of honour conferred on a Noble by the Sovereign recognising that particular person’s higher rank and status (that is, a higher title than the standard, Lord), usually due to services to the Crown and/or closeness to the Sovereign or royal family, for example, the Late Baron Vaea.

Honourable (Hon.) – an honorific styling used before the name of the child of a Noble, for example, Hon. Ivana Vaea, daughter of Lord and Lady Vaea. The use of this styling was first developed by King Tāufaʻāhau for his first grandchild, Sālote Lupepauʻu Salamasina Purea Vahine Arii ‘Oe Hau Tuita, who as the child of the King’s only daughter, Princess Sālote Mafile'o Pilolevu, and Lord Tuita, was not entitled to be called ‘Princess’. The King apparently felt that it was not appropriate for any of his grandchildren to go without official royal titles and so this convention was created. Under King George Tupou V, the use of the styling ‘Honourable’ became more widely used to include not just royal grandchildren (and their children) who were not princes or princesses, but also the children of a Noble.

King – the male Sovereign head of state, who is the highest-ranking member of the Royal family, for example, King George Tupou VI.

Lady – the wife of a Noble (Lord), for example, Lady Siatukimoana Vaea, wife of Lord Vaea.

Life Peer – an appointed member of the peerage (Tongan nobility) whose title is not hereditary, usually appointed for services to the Crown and the Kingdom of Tonga, for example, Lord Sevele of Vailahi (former prime minister and first Tongan ‘commoner’ to hold the position).

Lord – title held by a member of the peerage (Tongan nobility) who is either the holder of one or more of the 33 Noble titles in Tonga (see Appendix C for list), someone appointed a Life Peer, or a member of the Privy Council or Judiciary
(usually referred to as Law Lords), for example, Lord Fakafanua, the Noble of Ma’ufanga, Nga’akau and Faleloa.

Lord Chamberlain – the senior most official of the Royal Household overseeing its business, including undertaking ceremonial duties and serving as the channel of communication between the Sovereign and Privy Council, and the Executive.

Majesty (HM) – the style used by the Sovereign and consort which outranks all other styles in Tonga, for example, His Majesty King Tupou VI.

Monarch – the Sovereign head of state in a monarchy, for example, King Tupou VI.

Noble – a male holder of one or more of the 33 hereditary aristocratic titles of Tonga. The title is, in fact, the name, for example Vaea is both the name and title, but in today’s usage (due to the insistence of King George Tupou V) ‘Lord’ is used before the name, for example, Lord Vaea.

Prince – the son of a prince or King/Queen, or the husband of a Queen regnant, for example, Prince Tāufa’āhau Manumataongo Tuku’aho, son of the Crown Prince Tupouto’a ʻUlukalala. In some exceptional cases, the Sovereign has granted specific Nobles this rank, with the style Serene Highness (see below).

Princess – the daughter of a prince or King/Queen, or wife of a prince, for example, Princess Mele Siuʻilikutapu Kalaniuvalu Fotofili, daughter of Prince Fatafehi Tuʻipelehake, second-son of Queen Sālote Tupou III.

Princess Royal – the eldest daughter of a King/Queen, who retains the title for life regardless of whether another King/Queen accedes to the throne and has a daughter of his/her own, for example, HRH Princess Sālote Mafileʻo Pilolevu, the Princess Royal.

Queen Consort – the wife of a King, for example, Queen Nanasipauʻu Tukuʻaho.

Queen Mother (or dowager Queen) – the living mother of the Sovereign and wife of a former Sovereign, for example, Queen Halaevalu Mataʻaho, the Queen Mother.

Queen Regnant – a female Sovereign head of state, for example, Queen Sālote Tupou III.

Regent – person appointed in the place of the monarch to administer matters of state for a period of time, usually due to the monarch being away for a long period of time, is incapacitated, or is a minor. The Regent retains their own personal rank but will often have the word regent as a title for the period of their regency, for example, Princess Sālote Mafileʻo Pilolevu Tuita, Princess Regent.

Royal Highness (HRH) – the style used by Tongan royal princes and princesses who are sons or daughters of a prince or King/Queen regent, those who are wives of a
royal prince, or husband of a Queen regent, for example, *HRH Princess Angelika Lātūfuipeka Halaevalu Mata‘aho Napua ‘Okalani Tuku‘aho*.

**Serene Highness** (HSH) – the style used by appointed Tongan princes who are usually noblemen (and their wives), for example, *HSH Prince Tu‘ipelehake and HSH Princess Tu‘ipelehake*.

*Note:* Many of the above have Tongan translations, which are often used in the daily conversations of Tongans (when speaking in Tongan). For example, *Pilinisi*, the Tongan transliteration for Prince, and *Kuini*, the Tongan transliteration for Queen. There are times when my interlocutors switched between using English and Tongan words and in all cases I have kept to the original and not provided a translation.
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Map 1. Map of the Kingdom of Tonga

Source. From the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website. Online: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands_oceans_poles/tonga.jpg (accessed 11 July 2018)
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Prologue

Somewhere Between Insider and Outsider

He Mihi

Ko Ruahine te maunga
Ko Oroua te awa
Ko Kauwhata te tangata
Ko Ngati Kauwhata te iwi
Ko Tainui te waka
Ko Areti Metuamate ahau

Ruahine is the mountain
Oroua is the river
Kauwhata is the ancestor
Ngati Kauwhata is the tribe
Tainui is the canoe
I am Areti Metuamate

In my Māori culture, one introduces oneself by way of reciting one’s *pepeha*. Your *pepeha* is an identifying statement that establishes your roots—where you come from, who your people are, and therefore who *you* are. When I was a young child I once stood to introduce myself at a *hui* (meeting) where I was in attendance with my grandparents, and because I did not want to speak for long, I simply said ‘*Kia ora tatou, Ko Areti Metuamate ahau*’ (Hello to all, I am Areti Metuamate) and sat down. My *kuia* (grandmother) immediately instructed me to stand up again and introduce myself. ‘Do it properly this time,’ she said. This time I recited my *pepeha*, as above, and sat down afterwards with more than a little bit of embarrassment, as I knew exactly what I had done wrong. In Māori culture, one’s identity is fundamentally connected to where one comes from, so it is never appropriate to introduce yourself simply by giving your name as that does not necessarily tell the listener anything about your position in relation to others. Still, a name can often say a great deal about where a person comes from. For example, my first and last names are both from my Cook Island heritage. Areti is the
name my mother’s father named me after seeing that I was fair skinned and recalling stories of a (white) European Christian missionary the Reverend G.A. Harris who, perhaps as a sign of their acceptance of him, was given the name Areti (a transliteration of Harris) by my Mangaian ancestors. But if I was to introduce myself in a Māori context in Aotearoa New Zealand, simply saying ‘I am Areti Metuamate’ says nothing of my connection to the tribal land, mountains, rivers, and lakes of my Māori ancestors. Of course, those who know my mother’s mother married a Cook Island man will recognise the connection and know where my heritage lies, but many people will not. This is why my grandmother made me stand again to introduce myself ‘properly’ because, essentially, to know who you are in our Māori culture is to know where you come from, and for someone to know who you are, they must know how you relate to others. Throughout my research this personal experience has proven to be valuable in my interactions with interlocutors, as it is something that Tongans (and many Oceanic peoples) can relate to.

**Opening eyes**

Flying over the island of Tongatapu was an experience I had always wanted, but, when it occurred one memorable day in late March 2012, it was a day I did not expect quite so soon. My last journey to the Kingdom of Tonga had been by boat—a cruise ship that I boarded in Japan as part of a youth delegation on the ‘Ship for World Youth’—travelling around the Pacific. That trip in early 2009 saw me experiencing the great Pacific Ocean at a time when large waves and heavy rain were our only obvious companions in the vastness of deep, blue sea. It was also a very memorable trip, but for reasons quite different to the one before. Back then in 2009, it was only a few months since George Tupou V had been crowned King. Now, he was dead, and I was on my way to attend his funeral as a friend of his niece (who he raised like a daughter).
The crowning of the new King in 2008 took place two years after Tupou V officially succeeded his deceased father, King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV. Tupou V’s coronation marked the birth of a new style of monarchy in Tonga, but his reign was short. In fact, it was the shortest of any Tongan monarch; he ruled for not quite five years after serving a very long period as heir-apparent—just over forty years as Crown Prince Tupoutoʻa.1

Tupou V’s sudden death in a Hong Kong hospital on 18 March 2012, aged sixty-three, came as a shock to the people of Tonga because even though he had suffered from ill health for some time, it was not widely known that his health issues were so serious. Only his closest staff, family and friends were aware of the treatment he was receiving but even they had no inkling that his days were so numbered.2 As is now apparent, even the specialist treatment given to Tupou V (his Private Secretary said he had a number of medical professors and specialists working around the clock to support him in his last days),3 was not enough to keep him alive and his passing was officially announced by the Tongan Government early on 19 March 2012.4

Tupou V’s funeral, which is discussed a number of times in this thesis, was a spectacular event full of ceremony and deep symbolism. It was a colourful demonstration of how Tonga’s strongly maintained traditions interact with the Christian practices that continue to play a crucial role in contemporary Tongan society.

1 Tupoutoʻa is the official title held by the Crown Prince in Tonga.
2 Discussion with King Tupou VI, 21 December 2012.
3 Interview with David Dunkley, 14 July 2012.
4 ‘Death of His Majesty King George Tupou V’, Tonga Government Gazette 8, 19 March 2012. Tonga Print Ltd.
Figure 1. King George Tupou V’s body being interred at Mala’e Kula
Source. Supplied by the Tongan Palace Office and used with permission

The response of the Tongan people to their departed monarch raised interesting questions for me regarding how they see their relationship with the King. I wondered how might the King have understood his relationship to them? Right before my eyes, while respecting the sad reality that I was participating in a funeral of a man who had died before his time, I started to consider what the King’s funeral represented and, indeed, what the King himself represented. I considered how interesting it would be to explore these questions further. It was there on 27 March 2012, sitting in a marquee at Mala’e Kula (the royal burial grounds in Nuku’alofa) at the King’s funeral that I decided I wanted my PhD thesis to explore Tongan kingship (later adding the key link to kinship). I had to acknowledge, then, that I would have to persuade my PhD supervisory panel that a significant change of topic five months after enrolment was a good idea. Thankfully after a number of discussions, they agreed.
Walking a fine line

Researching Tongan kingship and kinship has been both challenging and interesting for me. As a Māori, Cook Islander, Tahitian and Pākehā, I am not Tongan. But my links with Tonga and Tongans, through friends and family, that span my entire lifetime, have made this journey possible. These intimate links are cultural, social and political, and have made my research journey a very personal one. Throughout my thesis, I hope you will see how my research, as an indigenous child of Oceania (a position I share with Tongans), has taken me beyond this topic alone, taught me more about myself, and given me a deeper understanding of what it means to be part of a community connected by Te Moananui a Kiwa (the great Pacific Ocean).

My PhD topic is close to home for many people I call friends. The current King’s daughter, Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho, is a friend of mine in Canberra, who was a fellow student of The Australian National University during much of my time there. Through her, I made friends with other members of her family. These relationships, and the relationships I have developed through them, are important to me, and may very well have influenced my thinking and approach to aspects of my research. Indeed, without these relationships I would not have gained certain insights and access to specific people, such as government officials, and the current King and Queen. I have, however, made every effort to ensure that I seek a broad range of sources, and in doing so I conducted more than fifty interviews (see Appendix B for a list of people interviewed), most of whom are not members of the Royal family or directly associated with it, to ensure an appropriate balance of perspectives. This has not been without its challenges, as I will discuss further in my thesis.

Finalising my thesis topic was also influenced by a fascination I have about the way power is exercised by and for ‘the people’, and how hierarchies have developed

\[5\] New Zealander of European descent, from my father’s line.
and evolved in response to cultural dynamics, and as a way of controlling human beings. I am interested in the notion of what leadership means in Oceania, and what being a leader means to those who are (supposedly) being led. As an extension of these interests, I am also intrigued by monarchical systems and the place, and space, of monarchs in relation to those around them. I have a fascination for monarchical ceremony/pagentry, protocol, costumes, representation and symbolism (which are all intricately connected), and perhaps somewhat ironically I am also a strong republican in relation to both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, because I believe that the head of state should be someone who is from those places, not sitting on a throne on the other side of the world. So Tonga’s monarchy—the kingdom so close to home but quite distant in my own understanding—has long been a topic of interest and curiosity for me.

During my first PhD research field trip to Tonga in July 2012 I was told by a Tongan friend that as a ‘Polynesian’, I was not really considered a pālangi in Tonga, because as a fellow Pacific Islander I share connections and heritage with Tongans. At the same time, because I was not Tongan, I was not really considered an ‘insider’. My friend explained that from a Tongan perspective, only a Tongan could be an insider, and a pālangi was, by definition, an outsider. She went on to suggest that my position was unique, because I was neither. As someone with Cook Island, Tahitian and Māori heritage, I was walking the line between the two. ‘You can do what a Tongan, and a pālangi, cannot do,’ she said, ‘but you have to be careful so people know you are not pretending to be either.’ Furthermore, she said that my position was one of ‘privilege’ as I would not be subject to the same restrictions a Tongan would be, meaning that I

6 Pālangi is a foreigner (to Tonga), usually with a white-skinned appearance. Non-white foreigners are referred to by different names.

7 Conversation with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, 15 July 2012.

8 Ibid.
would be able to carry out my research more freely and gain access to information and people who would normally be out of reach to a Tongan commoner.\(^9\) Reflecting on what my friend said, and considering what it meant to be described as neither an insider nor an outsider in Tonga, I asked ‘But what does that actually make me then?’ ‘You’re just in the middle,’ she replied. ‘You have to tread carefully between the two.’\(^10\)

I eventually warmed to the idea that I was walking the line between being a Tongan insider, and a \textit{pālangi} outsider, partly because—rightly or wrongly—I felt it gave me some legitimacy in my work, and because I have a slight aversion to the use of terms like outsider and insider when used to describe (or categorise) the position of an ethnographer. Kirin Narayan puts it well in her essay ‘How Native is a “Native” Anthropologist’ when she says, ‘What we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts’.\(^11\) To me, my relations are always more important than working out how much of an insider or outsider I am. In the Pacific context, I would argue (and my interlocutors supported this view without any prompting by myself) the most important consideration of any researcher is maintaining good relations, and ensuring that they approach their work with respect, care and sensitivity to the \textit{mana}\(^12\) and \textit{tapu}\(^13\) of the people with whom, and the land on which, they are working. This is an approach I have tried hard to maintain in all my work in Tonga, and with Tongans in the diaspora. Insider or outsider, native or foreigner, indigenous or non-indigenous: these are simply black and white binaries when applied

\(^9\) ‘Commoner’ is the term used by Tongans when describing the class of people below the nobility. See Chapter Three.


\(^12\) \textit{Mana}, in this context, is the divine status, position, authority or power inherent in every person.

\(^13\) \textit{Tapu} is the sacredness of things, land and people.
to the place of a researcher in their field. There will always be a grey area of far greater complexity, such as in my case in Tonga. While some researchers may prefer to identify as part of a strictly demarcated category, I am quite comfortable being, and being considered, somewhere between an insider and outsider.

**Interviewing the King and Queen**

Because of my friendship with their daughter, I had met the King and Queen a number of times when they lived in Canberra but we were not friends and our connection was warm but not close. There was always a sense of formality when engaging with them, partly because I recognised that in their culture they were the equivalent of ‘Ariki’ (paramount chiefs) in mine, and partly because there was always an attendant or official looking person with them. When they took on their new roles, the formality increased and not only do they have new titles, the King is always accompanied by his Aide De Camp, who usually wears military uniform and in public settings is always a step behind the King. People have asked me what it was like interviewing the King and Queen and some have suggested I should have added far more detail about this, such as what they were like as people, what the interview setting was like, what they wore in interviews, and what I thought of them. That is a difficult thing to do when you have a personal connection with someone. I acknowledge that I likely paid too little attention to those details as I was so focused on getting interesting and useful material in response to my questions. What I can recall is that on the occasions I interviewed the King and the Queen (I interviewed the King alone in their Kolovai home, and then King and Queen together, and I interviewed the King alone at Polata'ane which was their main town house in Nuku'alofa before they moved into the Royal Palace just down the road), they were entirely open in their response to my questions, and they offered far more insights than I imagined. In all these interviews there were no attendants in the room and interviews were more like conversations, one of which went for almost two hours,
despite me only having arranged a one hour booking in the King’s calendar. The King is a quietly spoken man who, despite having a rather imposing presence given his height and breadth, comes across very humble. He moves slowly but deliberately and listens attentively. You can tell he exercises regularly (something he confirmed with me) and is quite youthful for his age (59). The Queen is gently spoken and very warm in her demeanor. Like everyone else around, including the King’s children, the Queen is reverential towards the King, who is five years younger than her. Interestingly, her reverence towards the King, as the senior most member of the Royal family, was not always replicated in the way some other members of the family engaged with her, despite her being the Queen. This is discussed in Chapter Five.

King or queen
A final preliminary reflection I want to make is that I am aware that this thesis can appear to give far more attention to Kings than Queens. The word play between kingship and kinship was just too irresistible for me since it distilled my main argument. But I certainly acknowledge that there has been a Queen regnant whose reign was more than forty years and whose influence over Tonga in the early to mid-twentieth century was profound. Each of the kings except George Tupou V have also had wives who have played important roles as Queen consorts; roles that are vital in the kingship and kinship webs that this thesis explores (Chapter Five considers this role closely). At a fundamental level kingship in Tonga is not about a ‘King’ at all, but a relationship between people and monarch. Tonga has had five kings and one queen but in the eyes of the Tongans I interviewed, Queen Sālote, who held the same paramount title of Tu‘i Kanokupolu as her father and his predecessors, had the same, if not more in certain contexts, influence and impact on Tonga than any other monarch.

Queen Salote is often referred to in scholarly materials as someone who was the paramount expert on Tongan culture, someone whose wisdom was unparalleled. She
‘had learned the genealogies as a girl from one of the Tuʻi Tonga women, but she made it her task to become the final authority on genealogies, as well as the authority on every other tradition and custom of her people.’

Chapter One

Introduction: Layers of Kingship, Layers of Kinship

As an individual the King is expected to embody a range of qualities, which this study outlines as *layers of kingship* ... going one step further it will show that the King is a representation of what it means to be Tongan and his role is but one of many *layers of kinship*. The core argument developed in this thesis is that Tonga\textsuperscript{15} is not governed by *kingship*, but by *kinship*.

This introductory chapter will set the scene for how I have approached my research in line with the imagery of the layers of kinship and layers of kingship in Tonga. It will start by outlining the *Tu’i* system, the ancient chiefly system that has governed Tonga for centuries and, although somewhat different now in the way it operates, still exists as a core part of the Tongan social system today. I will argue strongly that the *Tu’i* system is central to understanding the place of the King in contemporary Tongan society. This chapter will then outline my research approach, looking at the research questions, ethical issues and the conceptual framework that underpins this thesis. It will then outline the key literature I reviewed covering Tongan and Pacific history, contemporary Tongan society, Tongan politics and government, monarchical and democratic systems of government, transnationalism and globalisation, and biography in the Pacific. Finally, it will offer an overview of each of the remaining seven chapters.

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\textsuperscript{15} Tonga meaning the place and the people (including those in the diaspora)—a key argument I make in this thesis.
The *Tu‘i* system

To properly understand Tonga’s present political and social hierarchy one must at least have a basic understanding of the traditional structures that underpin it. While much has been written about Tongan monarchs, particularly Kings Tupou I and II, and Queen Sālote Tupou III, there is, understandably, given the more ancient eras in which they lived, less known, either through oral histories or texts, about the paramount leaders (the *Tu‘i*) prior to Tupou I. Perhaps this is also because, as Tongan scholar Sione Lātūkefu claims, the system of three different *Tu‘i* that governed the Tongan chiefly system was rather more complex and elaborate than other parts of Oceania, even where rank hierarchies prevailed as in Hawai‘i, Tahiti or Samoa.\(^{16}\) Tonga’s *Tu‘i* system is unique both in its underlying structure and in its ability to survive, albeit in a transformed fashion, into the twenty-first century.

For around a thousand years even before the first Tongan King was officially declared in the Constitution in 1875, the highest status at the pinnacle of Tongan society was reserved for the *Ha‘a Tu‘i* (the highest group of chiefly title holders), comprising ultimately three royal dynasties, the *Tu‘i Tonga*, the *Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua* and the *Tu‘i Kanokupolu*.\(^{17}\) The *Tu‘i Tonga* is the oldest, most sacred and pre-eminent of the titles, the *Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua* the second, and the *Tu‘i Kanokupolu* the third. To give a sense of how far these titles go back, the current Tongan monarch, King Tupou VI, is also the twenty-fourth *Tu‘i Kanokupolu*. While this is the lowest of the three titles, the other two lines are not continuous today and so there is no longer a named titleholder for the *Tu‘i Tonga*, and the *Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua*, although there are descendants of those lines. That being noted, the current King is in fact a descendant of all three lines as his grandmother

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\(^{17}\) Ibid.
Queen Sālote was of the Tu‘i Tonga and the Tu‘i Kanokupolu lines, while his grandfather Prince Tungī was of the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua line. Their eldest son, King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV was the first ever person to descend from all three lines of Tu‘i, and it was widely accepted that he was the most highly ranked individual person in all of Tonga at birth. The subtleties and significance of this historical status are examined later in the thesis.

Lātūkefu explained that the next most senior in rank after the Ha‘a Tu‘i, were the hou‘eiki or chiefs. The chiefly class was made up of those who were of the most senior chiefly families or those who descended from one of the three Tu‘i. After the hou‘eiki came the mu‘a or gentry class, and then the matāpule, who made up the chief’s most senior attendants, sometimes referred to as ‘talking chiefs’ due to their key role as speakers on behalf of the Tu‘i or hou‘eiki. After the matāpule came the commoner class, tu‘a, who were followed by the pōpula, the slave class. Since the early 1900s, as will be outlined in the Chapter Two, the classes have become more simply separated into three—royalty, nobility and commoners.

According to a number of my interlocutors, Tonga’s hierarchical social structure is not entirely based on service to the upper classes within the system, although many acknowledge that there is an outside perception that this is the case. There is also an obligation on the part of the King and royal family to give back to the people, and for the nobles to demonstrate a commitment to the people of their villages. This reciprocity is based on the concept of fatongia, described by Manu Naufahu as

18 Interview with Lupepau’u Tuita, July 2012.
19 Ibid.
20 Lātūkefu, ‘The definition of authentic Oceanic cultures with particular reference to Tongan culture’.
21 Ibid.
the responsibilities that come with who you are. Everyone in Tonga has a fatongia. For example, I have a fatongia towards my parents, and towards my Dad’s sister [as the mehekitanga] I also have certain fatongia.22

Naufahu goes on to say that

when people have fatongia towards the King, the King has a duty towards his people. When it comes to Church fatongia, the King puts in money for his misinale (annual donation towards the Church). Tupou VI is a King and is also the Noble title holder of Pea (Lavaka). He has to do his misinale at Saione [the principal Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga] as the King. So just like the other Nobles the King has to give back.23

Similarly, Falekava Kupu explained to me that reciprocity is a fundamentally important value in the Tongan social order and is central to a number of key concepts (in addition to fatongia) that shape Tongan social relations. Three particular concepts that he mentioned that directly relate to reciprocity are: feveitokai’aki, tauhi vaha’a, and hounga’ia.

Feveitokai’aki is respect for each other. Tauhi vaha’a is keeping relations. Village people have certain duties towards a Noble and the Noble has certain duties too. If one of the villagers has a funeral, the Noble will attend because of feveitokai’aki because he respects them. If the Noble did not come they would say ‘the Noble is not feveitokai’aki—they have forgotten what we did for them and are not reciprocating’. People will see a whole lot of food coming to the royal family—hundreds of baskets. But the royals don’t keep it all. It gets distributed to families, matāpule (talking chiefs). Recycling back to the people. Redistribution.

22 Interview with Manu Naufahu, no. 2, June 2015.

23 Ibid.
We always have appreciation or gratitude (hounga’ia) not just for what you’ve done, but for what your parents or grandparents have done. Those things are remembered and you will be acknowledged for that.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Tauhi vaha’a} is defined as a vow to maintain family and community ties. The literal meaning of this concept is similar to the golden rule, ‘Do unto others, as you would like done unto you’, or ‘If I take care of you, you take care of me’.\textsuperscript{25} In Tonga, particularly in the villages, when families were in need of money, food, or other commodities, or help in the home, they would turn to their fellow villagers. Village neighbours were like their own family. A Tongan woman explained in a church meeting that Tongan families were very poor in the past and they gave all they had to help each other. It was considered an act of shame if a person did not maintain their obligation to their family and community. Such selfishness and greed is deemed deviant in the Tongan way of life.\textsuperscript{26}

While the idea of reciprocity is central to how one interacts in Tonga, it is slightly less so in the diaspora where, as discussed in Chapter Six, the further removed people are from the islands of Tonga, the less they tend to abide by certain ideals of reciprocity. While reciprocal relations have a common significance throughout the Pacific, Tonga has a range of unique social practices that demonstrate the importance of this in the day-to-day lives of most Tongans. This is explored in Chapter Two, apropos the concept of fahu.

To outsiders, Tonga’s hierarchical system might seem to be dominated by the privileges of the few at the top but as Epeli Hau’ofa (the Tongan scholar who was born

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in Papua New Guinea) argued, this ‘closely graded hierarchy constituted intricately
interwoven networks of kinship ties that helped unite the entire society.’

Today, although Tonga has modernised and become less hierarchical and also more
individualist, it is still very much ruled under the Tu’i system and governed by the
principles and values of reciprocity described earlier.

**Research approach**

My interest in Tonga is as much personal as academic. As outlined in the Prologue,
where I situated myself as a young Pacific Islander scholar walking a fine line between
being an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ in Tonga, I have had many close friendships with
Tongan people since I was a young boy. My closest cousin is also married to a Tongan,
and so their children, my nieces and nephews, carry the blood of both my ancestors, and
their Tongan ancestors. That connection is very important to me.

My primary academic interest is in governance and leadership in Oceania, and
particularly in, for want of a better word, my own immediate neighbourhood—
Polynesia. I am deeply interested in how traditional leadership structures have evolved
across Oceania and how leaders lead in an increasingly globalised world. The link
between Tongan kinship and kingship, therefore, is a subject that naturally fits my
interests, both personal and academic.

In approaching my research topic I was well aware of my own limitations. I was
not a fluent speaker of *lea fakatonga*, the Tongan language, and had only a basic
understanding of Tonga’s history. As well as these shortcomings, I also had to
acknowledge that my experience of Tonga was as a visitor who had never lived there,
albeit a fellow Pacific Islander with many shared cultural values and traditions. My

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28 I have never identified myself as Polynesian and cannot think of any family member who does.
relationships with Tongan friends posed both opportunities and challenges for my role as a researcher and it was clear at the outset that I would need to develop protocols or guidelines, which I outline later in this chapter, around how I would manage these relationships.

As a student of political science and strategic studies, my other challenge was to approach my research with a different mindset. Rather than analysing reports, policy documents, and undertaking interviews with the intention of collating statistical data, as I had done in previous research, I would need to draw on the research methods of anthropology and history, and quickly develop an appreciation of ethnography, participant observation and in-depth interviewing.

The process I came to, after discussions with my supervisors and other researchers of Tonga, was to use a mixture of in-depth interviewing and participant observation both in Tonga and among the Tongan diaspora in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. I also wanted to immerse myself in Tonga as much as possible and spent time learning the language through a tutor and watching YouTube clips on Tonga, as well as listening to Tongan music referred to me by friends. Although it was suggested to me that I consider going to stay in Tonga for an extended period of time, (several months when I had only planned four ten to fourteen day trips), I decided against this assuming that my close links with the Tongan community in Canberra would give me ample opportunities to surround myself with the language and people. In hindsight, I acknowledge that a more extended immersion in Tonga itself would have added another level of richness to my research. Still, each of my four field trips to Tonga was immensely valuable and indispensable. It was while eating local food, spending time in the homes of my interlocutors, shopping at the local market, and attending birthdays, weddings and funerals that I got to see what text and printed images cannot show. The depth of insights I received even after my first field trip alone left me with three full
notebooks, and many hours of recorded interviews. Tonga was at the heart of my research context, but I also spent days and weeks amongst Tongans in the diaspora, as well as time in archives in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Another space where I found abundant material for my research was the internet, particularly via the social media sites of Facebook and, to a lesser extent, Twitter. Initially I used these avenues to get in touch with potential interlocutors and to organise interviews or find details of events, but, as my research progressed, Facebook in particular also became a safe place for people to exchange views and share photos, and for me to keep in touch with my interlocutors and others who were comfortable enough to add me as a Facebook ‘friend’. This enabled me to see their photos of events and activities, and even the comments they and their other ‘friends’ were making about what was depicted in the photos.

The important role Facebook (as discussed in Chapter Six) played in my research was not one I anticipated at first, primarily because, although I had read Helen Lee’s important work about Tongans online, I had not been aware of the extent to which Tongans use Facebook. A colleague of mine at The Australian National University, Nikki Mariner, whose research on her ancestor William Mariner, a young English castaway who survived a shipwreck in Tonga and was adopted into the highest echelons of Tongan royalty of the time, was the first to show me how Facebook was a useful research tool. As she explained, ‘while other people research Facebook, I am using Facebook to research. It is a key research method.’

Nikki Mariner had developed a Facebook page dedicated to encouraging conversations online about her ancestor. The Facebook page gathered hundreds of followers and became a forum for scholars to share insights into William Mariner’s life, and for descendants of Mariner to both share their stories or ask questions either about their famous ancestor, or other members of the

29 Personal communication with Nikki Mariner, 12 October 2011.
broader family. Today there are more than 1200 members who have joined the page and they continue to share stories, ask questions and connect. A large number of the members are Samoan and Tongan (one of Mariner’s sons settled in Samoa in the 1830s and had a large family with his Tongan wife).\textsuperscript{30} In Chapter Six, I elaborate further on the findings I made through Facebook and draw some parallels between the Tongan kinship ‘web’ and the World Wide Web.

The most significant body of research material used in this thesis however is that which was gathered through the structured in-depth interviews. In total there were fifty-five formal in-depth interviews with forty-four people,\textsuperscript{31} totalling approximately fifty hours of audio recordings and many weeks of transcribing. I initially committed to not limiting the number of interlocutors I would have, and so I started off with a list of twenty people whom I wanted to interview and would hopefully be able to get suggestions of other people to talk to—a process referred to as the snowballing effect. That started well and I received some excellent suggestions so that after a few interviews I had a long list of potential interlocutors. As word spread of my interviews, and the snowballing effect started to work, I was even being approached by people I did not know about someone they had in mind I should speak with, or who wanted to speak with me themselves. After my first field trip to Tonga it became clear that I might benefit from drawing a line at a maximum number of interviews as I was becoming aware of the time that it would take to transcribe and then the need to be able to traverse the material when I had it all transcribed and typed and was proceeding to analyse it.

Who to interview was a key question in the early stages of my research. I knew that I wanted to speak with a broad cross-section of Tongan society and so made a general rule that for every member of the Tongan ruling class of royals/nobles and

\textsuperscript{30} N. William Mariner (Toki ‘Ukamea) 1791–1853, Facebook Page.

\textsuperscript{31} See list of interlocutors in Appendix B.
government officials, I would speak with someone who was not in a position of power or privilege, someone who might best be referred to as an ordinary (commoner) Tongan. As much as possible I maintained that rule because, as outlined in Chapter Three, Tonga has a highly stratified hierarchical society and although I wanted that to be a focus of my research, I did not want it to negatively affect how I conducted my research. I understood the risks of my research being influenced by people who wanted me to portray a particular message, and I also understood that the perception of this influence was a risk in itself, given my personal relationships. Because of this I was extremely careful about approaching people not connected directly with my own friends, and with people my friends introduced me to. Most importantly, I wanted a diversity of perspectives from Tongan people. I strongly believe that every person in a social group of any sort, and no matter where they sit in the hierarchy of that group, has a legitimate and important perspective about that group that should be treated with equal regard by the researcher. As much as possible I wanted insights to come directly from as many parts of the Tongan population as possible, both in Tonga and the diaspora, and from the highest chief (the King), through to the humblest commoner. I also wanted to ensure that I spoke with elders, and young people, and a balanced mix of genders. This was essential for me, especially because in reviewing a wide range of literature I could see gaps that I believed only the voices of Tongan people could fill.

Narrative inquiry, a research methodology that explores experiences through ‘collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with the milieus’; 32 has helped me to understand my research topic from the perspective of those people who understand it best. This means reflecting on their own life experiences and stories, and thus providing deeper insights

about their society than published data, journals, books and reports can furnish. I have been able to identify a number of key themes from my interview material that have shaped my final thesis and because I am engaging my interlocutors in a partnership of sorts, I have often gone back to them to talk through further questions or to get their perspective on something new I might have discovered after our initial interview. This collaboration is an attempt on my part to empower my interlocutors as co-researchers.

An important thing I have had to remind myself is that my research was not a fact-finding mission or an attempt to find a singular truth. In line with the narrative inquiry methodology, I was more interested in how people know what they know and understanding the way they share what they know, rather than whether what they know is ‘correct’ by some elusive objective criteria. I very quickly became aware that I could quite easily get two very different stories about what happened at a particular time in Tonga’s history from two people of a similar age who were from the same village and in close proximity to the event. I also had a number of situations where material offered to me was someone’s opinion and what I had to consider was the point they were making, or what they were telling me, by offering their opinion. In these situations, I listened, took notes, and asked clarifying questions, but I did not contradict or challenge what I was being told. Instead I have considered each and every perspective shared with me to help tell a story about Tonga, its kinship and kingship systems, in a way that gives voice to all my interlocutors, even if at times I was not sure if something told to me, would be generally agreed to be a ‘fact’ or not.

A good example of this was in relation to King George Tupou V. I had read that the late King had a daughter, outside of marriage, who was based in Aotearoa New Zealand. This in itself was not a vital thing for me to know, but it was a topic of interest because I needed to understand the status of any children of a monarch, legitimate or illegitimate, in order to fully understand how succession works. In one of my earliest
interviews an interlocutor voluntarily said to me that the late King was not a father and that the girl people talk about as his illegitimate daughter was simply someone whose mother the late King was a friend with, and for whom the King cared deeply. In a subsequent interview with another interlocutor, however, I was told while we were discussing adoption of royal children, that Tupou V had a daughter, and what her name was, where she lived, and even which members of the royal family accepted her as the late King's daughter. Even when I decided to include this topic in my line of questioning with some members of the royal family, I received different answers with some accepting there was an ‘illegitimate daughter’, and others either not convinced of it, or remaining ambivalent. My approach to this (and other similar situations) has been to include relevant material as much as I can and simply be transparent about the fact that much of the material quoted in my thesis is not necessarily consensually agreed as ‘factual’ and that this is completely fine. I have made every effort to note any biases as a natural part of the process while still engaging with the material and, where possible, offering alternative or even opposing views. I have found it both challenging and rewarding to accurately reflect the stories shared with me while at the same time providing a clear argument about what my own thoughts and conclusions are. Ultimately, I have done my best to honour what my interlocutors have shared with me because I believe that the perspectives and theories they present are just as important as those offered in any scholarly texts.

**Interview principles and protocols**

As discussed in the Prologue to this thesis, my relationships are a central part of my research approach and because of some of these relationships, and the associated perspectives or biases that I brought to my research, I developed a set of guiding principles for my interviews to ensure I maintained my own sense of integrity about how I conducted myself and how I engaged with my interlocutors. These were:
Meet interlocutors at a place of their choosing

There are not many cafes and public places where one can meet in Tonga and noting the intimate/close-knit society in Tonga, some people may not have felt comfortable talking with me where others could see them. Thus, at all times I gave my interlocutor the choice as to where we would meet.

Invite interlocutors to bring a friend, or family member, with them to the interview

This was important for many reasons but the two main ones are that some people would feel more comfortable with another person present, and the other is that culturally it would not be appropriate for some people (a young woman for example) to meet with me (a young man) alone.

Provide interlocutors with an understanding of my personal background, interest in Tonga and my research topic

I am not Tongan, and cannot speak much of the Tongan language, but I am a fellow Pacific Islander with a long personal connection to Tonga through friends and family. This also involved being upfront about my royal friends. In some cases, I also explained what a PhD was and that I wanted to bring a Pacific Island scholar’s perspective to the literature on Tongan kingship.

Offer for interlocutors to have a pseudonym that I could use in my writing

For obvious reasons this was appropriate to offer but especially given the relative proximity every Tongan person has to the royal family and the King, it was important to let people know they could share their perspectives with me without worrying that their name would be associated with their comments in my thesis. Interestingly, one of the people I interviewed who was a senior public servant, whom I had assumed would not wish to use a pseudonym, did in fact wish to, and yet another person who I had assumed would not want to be identified was happy to be so.
Be clear that I would not be discussing who I was interviewing, or what they said, with any of my Tongan friends or other interlocutors

This is something I was advised to do by a respected scholar on Tonga and I am glad I did so because two different people said they were glad that I could assure them of the confidentiality and that they would have been less open about sharing their perspectives if I did not. I also let people know that if they wanted to amend anything they had said to me, or withdraw any comments, they were also welcome to. This happened on two occasions.

Acknowledge the support interlocutors are providing to my research with some sort of koha recognition

In line with my own Māori cultural values, and the importance of reciprocity in Tonga, it was important for me to actively show my gratitude for the time given and insights shared with me by providing a koha. Koha is the Māori concept of providing a contribution, offering, or gift as part of reciprocal relationship building. In my case, I provided a small gift, took food (if I was visiting someone’s home), or shouted lunch or dinner at a café. The koha did not need to be anything expensive or substantial, but a clear symbol of thanks, demonstrating that what they were doing was of value and I was grateful.

Ask for any suggestions of other people they think I should speak with

As noted above, this helped me to expand the number and range of my interlocutors.

Although I had a clear set of ethical guidelines from the University, it was important for me that my personal approach to this research project demonstrated to my interlocutors that I was not only behaving appropriately as a researcher, but that I wanted the research to be as much on their terms as possible and for that to happen I needed to be open about my limitations and my relationships, and thus let each interlocutor have more control over the interview process.
Research questions

The primary research question which frames this thesis is: *Is there an interconnectedness between Tongan kingship and Tongan kinship, and if so why, and what does this look like?* In addressing this overarching question, the four broad objectives of my research were:

1. to find out what Tongan kingship and Tongan kinship means, in the context of other polities in the Pacific and other monarchies in the world;
2. to understand the current role of the King, both in Tonga and in the world, and to understand what the role used to be and how it has evolved to what it is now;
3. to explore the perspectives and stories of those people who have a direct personal connection to Tonga and its kinship and kingship systems;
4. to develop a theory about the future place of the King in Tonga, while considering the rise of democracy, transnationalism, and globalisation.

These research objectives have all evolved, such that the primary research question itself has been reconfigured several times. Constructing one’s research plan is essential at the outset, but it is just as essential to be able and willing to reconstruct your research plan as you go.\(^{33}\) As Joseph Maxwell suggests for qualitative research, ‘any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component.’\(^{34}\)

In my research journey the focus of my topic shifted. Because of a strong interest in biography, I initially thought my entire thesis could be developed using the life of King George Tupou V (see Figure 2) as a lens through which I could explore my research questions. That proved to be quite difficult for a number of reasons but primarily because it felt too narrow to address the broader research objectives that I was very keen to address. Although this is no longer a biography I have still been able to


\(^{34}\) Ibid.
weave a discussion of the late King’s life throughout my thesis and especially in Chapter Four, the Symbolic King.

I explore Tupou V’s life using the stories and images shared by interlocutors who knew him and others who did not know him. I also use some of the late King’s own writings and speeches to try to understand what he himself saw as his role. Chapter Four, therefore, is both a look at the King through others’ eyes, and also a look at Tonga through the lens of the King.

Figure 2. King George Tupou V with a monocle hanging above his belt
Source: Unknown.

In line with my broad research objectives I developed a number of secondary research questions. These were:

- Is Tongan kinship and Tongan kingship different to other places?
- Who or what governs Tonga?
- How does someone become King?
− What does the King do?
− What does the King represent?
− What future does the Tongan King have?
− What does it mean to be Tongan?
− How and where does one identify as Tongan?
− What is the future of the Tongan Monarchy in relation to a democratic Tonga?

Given my long-term interest in Tonga and its monarchical system I was keen to explore Tongans’ views of the King’s role. Moreover, I was interested in whether there was a different view held by Tongans in Tonga and those large numbers who live in the diaspora (see Chapter Six).

Research ethics considerations

At an ANU seminar for new PhD students I was intrigued by a comment a colleague, who was studying psychology, made to the group. She said that research loses its ethical rigour when the researcher starts to include their own thoughts, feelings and biases into the research. This seemed at odds with the advice of my supervisors, who were quite comfortable with me bringing my own personal experiences and understandings to my research and who made it clear that, if anything, so long as I was upfront about this, it would actually enrich my research. Every researcher brings their own experiential knowledge with them when they embark on a research journey and I have been no different. John Heron and Peter Reason used the term ‘critical subjectivity’ to refer to one’s reflexive awareness in which the researcher does not suppress their personal experience or allow themselves to be swept away and overwhelmed by it, but rather raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process. Critical subjectivity was important for me, especially in the way I engaged with my interlocutors.

A key ethical issue that arose for me, which I outlined in my human research ethics proposal, and touched on earlier, was in relation to my friendships with Tongan people, particularly members of the royal family. As part of designing my research plan, which included guidelines for the interviews outlined earlier, I made a commitment to myself that I would not share any information with my friends that I had gathered before the publication of my thesis. I have not shared any interview material with friends (except for their own transcripts to seek clarification or comment) and I have not discussed what my key findings have been. At no time has any one of my friends suggested that I show them my work before it is published, and I respect that a great deal.

As noted earlier, I offered my interlocutors the option of being referred to by a pseudonym in my writing. In a few cases, at the request of an interlocutor, I have used pseudonyms in my work. In one case I actually suggested to an interlocutor that he may wish to use a pseudonym because of the frank nature of his comments and the fact that information he shared might be in direct conflict with information shared by another interlocutor. Even without me giving him too many details he was happy to oblige but as it transpired after a few more months of research I learned that the somewhat frank observations made were not only shared by a number of others, they were available in news media sources and widely accepted as true. Given this, I approached him again, apologised for being rather presumptuous by suggesting he use a pseudonym and asked if he wished to now have this name recorded in my thesis. He declined, and said he still wished to have a pseudonym because he would then not have to worry about whether he offended anyone or brought shame to his family by sharing these views.

**Reflexivity**

Cultural anthropology in the 1970s and 80s saw theorists such as Clifford and Marcus (1986) in “Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography” influence
Western anthropology and ethnography deeply, by examining how personal biases, worldviews and epistemologies influence anthropological work, in what they termed a political and epistemological crisis. Clifford and Marcus highlighted the changing field of ethnography, which was now challenging the work of Western writers who were writing about non-Western peoples. Although this does not apply to my own work, the idea that all work on other cultures is influenced by personal epistemologies is very relevant to my research with Tongan peoples. In my own case, my Maori and Pacific Islander heritage is what enables my work to occur, and deeply influences how I see, experience and write about other Pacific peoples, including Tongans.

The term ‘reflexivity’ is sometimes used to describe a key concept in anthropological practice, that requires those studying other cultures to acknowledge and interrogate their own biases and worldviews. Many Pacific Studies and Indigenous Studies scholars more broadly have written on how this view is somewhat at odds with Indigenous ways of viewing knowledge, people and experiences, underpinned by relatedness (which assumes all things are, by nature, deeply connected and influenced by each other). As Rogers explains, ‘Indigenous peoples know through knowledges that have been shared with us — by ancestors, spiritually, by Elders and by community, through stories, art, song and dance, and through lived experiences, informed by our relatedness and relationships with others’. It is these relationships that are the core of my own research practice as a Pacific Islander scholar. This both distinguishes my work from that of non-Indigenous/non-Pasifika researchers, and the work of Tongan scholars.


I am, therefore, as discussed in the Prologue, both an insider and an outsider and my views are deeply informed by my relationships, whether they be blood or friendship-based.

**Conceptual framework**

While my thesis was always going to sit in the pacific studies space, it draws on the disciplines of anthropology, history and political science, which is my primary area of academic study thus far in my career. In developing my conceptual framework for analysis and writing I tried to use some graphic models. First on the whiteboard in my office I wrote the word ‘Kingship’ and drew a circle around it. Beside that circle I then drew another circle and wrote the word ‘Kinship’ in it. Thinking of the link between the two, I then drew a line between the circles and added arrows pointing in both directions to show an interconnectedness. What I soon realised was that my first attempt at developing a graphic model of my conceptual framework was flawed because I had started the drawing assuming a division that was not necessarily there (see Figure 3). In reality, my hypothesis was that Tongan ‘Kingship’ and ‘Kinship’ were interconnected and so I needed to look at it differently.

![Figure 3. Model One: Kingship to kinship](image)

*Source.* Drawn by author

So I drew another diagram. This time I drew a big circle and then inside the circle wrote the word ‘King’ and circled it, then the word ‘Nobles’ and circled it, and then the word ‘People’ and circled it. Underneath I wrote ‘Tongan kinship’ which
indicated what the bigger circle represented, and so the three different classes of Tonga were all joined by Tongan kinship (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Model Two: Tongan kinship**

Source. Drawn by author

The only problem I had with this diagram (Figure 4) was that each of the circles, while inside the broader circle of ‘Tongan kinship’, were separate and did not show the connectedness to each other. Conceptually, this diagram did not go far enough to show the links. So I gave it one more go, this time drawing a big circle and at the top wrote ‘People’, then inside that circle I drew another circle, and at the top of that I wrote ‘Nobles’, and within that layer I drew another circle and then wrote the word ‘King’. Essentially there were three layers of a circle representing Tongan society today, what might be described as the layers of Tongan kinship (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Model Three: Tongan kinship as layers**

Source. Drawn by author
This diagram suggested that within the people were the nobles and the King, and looking at it the other way, the King and nobles were also part of the people. Admittedly, this was a very simplistic diagram that did not display the complexity of the relationships and connections between the layers, or any of the bases of shared kinship between them. But it was a start for me to picture what I was exploring, to understand more deeply how Tongan kinship, like Tongan kingship was constituted by a range of interconnected, interdependent, relationships.

Essentially, my conceptual framework was based on the information already published (literature), my own ideas and biases (personal knowledge), the information shared by people I knew who had relevant knowledge and insights (personal relationships), and insights from a group of people I did not yet know but wanted to engage with, primarily Tongans who were my potential interlocutors. I have regularly returned and refined my conceptual framework, during analysis and writing.

**A sacred topic? Exploring the literature**

In an early discussion with a relative about pursuing this PhD research topic, I was warned that it might be quite a difficult topic to pursue, not only because I was not Tongan, but because the topic related to the place of the Tongan King; a person and position with a high level of *tapu*. I knew this was indeed a valid concern and one that I had thought long and hard about. My understanding of *tapu* was about the sacredness of something or someone. In the Māori context, every person has a level of *tapu* but some have more than others by virtue of their birth or the type of activities they are involved with. For example, a priest who spends a great deal of time in prayer and communicating with God has a higher level of *tapu* than most people, particularly when undertaking priestly duties. There is also an element of ‘restriction’ associated with how one might engage a *tapu* object or person. In Māori culture, for example, one should not take food into a cemetery because food is seen as something that diminishes *tapu*. But
the ‘restriction’ that is associated with tapu is contextual rather than absolute. In fact, I was raised to believe that if you go about things the right way—with respect and care—you may still be able to engage with a tapu object or person without having any negative impact on the tapu.

I felt my PhD topic was not going to be too difficult in this regard, because I had every intention of treading carefully and respectfully in pursuing my research. In all my pre-research discussions with Tongans it was made clear to me that the topic I was intending to research was one that would require this respect and care, because of the level of tapu associated with the King. I would not have to simply learn and know the appropriate way of undertaking my research, people told me, I would also have to be able to demonstrate that to anyone who was watching me or reading my work. The late noble, Lord Fusitu’a said to me that I should do three things. First, I should spend time with Tongans and at Tongan events as much as I could, and ‘watch, listen, smell, taste and don’t be afraid to feel’. Second, I should speak with as many Tongans as possible. ‘Ask many questions and listen carefully for the answers. Sometimes things require reading between the lines.’ Third, I should read a great deal of works from Tongan scholars and scholars on Tonga:

There is so much there to read and to soak up. Not of all it is historically accurate or well researched, but the more you read the better you will become at finding what has value and what does not.

His advice proved to be invaluable, as I will demonstrate in further chapters.

In this thesis I share a number of stories of my trips to Tonga and my attendance at Tongan events in the diaspora and use these to articulate particular insights I gained

38 Interview with Lord Fusitu’a (senior), July 2012.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
in my research. As earlier explained, I have drawn heavily on the rich body of information that has come out of more than fifty interviews I conducted involving over forty interlocutors. These two sources of research material were by far the most valuable, but I also acknowledge that my thinking has been heavily influenced by a depth of scholarly research that relates to Tonga and the Pacific. I have tried to use the work of as many Tongan scholars as possible, noting that I was not able to use some material that was only in the Tongan language because of my limited Tongan language ability. Key Tongan scholars such as Epeli Hau‘ofa, whose path breaking work ‘Our Sea of Islands’ has in many ways shaped the way Pacific studies scholars write about the Pacific today. Sione Lätūkefu, Tēvita O. Ka‘ili, ‘Okusitino Māhina, Karlo Mila and Futa Helu have all written rich texts about Tongan identity, history and hierarchy.

I also draw extensively the scholarship of key foreign scholars of Tonga, particularly Guy Powles, Ian Campbell, Helen Lee, Niko Besnier, Adrienne Kaepplar, and Ping-Ann Addo. I have also engaged heavily with the important works by Elizabeth Wood-Ellem and Margaret Hixon on Queen Sālote Tupou III. While much has been written on Queen Sālote, there is little literature on King Taufaahau Tupou IV, who ruled for more than forty years, and I am part of a small project group working on a biography of this King which will be made up of a range of chapters written by different authors looking at different stages of his reign. Likewise, there is very little literature on King George Tupou V, although his reign was much shorter, and this thesis attempts to provide material that could be built on, and that has never been published before. There is also a growing literature on the role of China in the Pacific and in Tonga and I explore some of that in Chapter Six.

This thesis is also inspired by the broader insights of other Pacific Islander scholars such as Albert Wendt, Teresia Teaiwa, Katerina Teaiwa, Brij V. Lal, Stacy Kamehiro, Fanny Wonu Veys and Noenoe Silva. Other key foreign scholars on the Pacific whose work I have engaged include Aletta Biersack, Margaret Jolly, Niel
Gunson, Phyllis Herda, Kerry James, Marshall Sahlins, Terence Wesley-Smith, Stewart Firth, Roger Keesing and Greg Dening. Given I had limited exposure to Pacific Islands scholarship prior to commencing this PhD, my work has been enriched by the breadth and depth of material I have been able to read and where possible I have sought to demonstrate that my ideas have been shaped by the work of these scholars, some of whom I agree with while others I differ from.

The works of Powles and Campbell are good examples of this. While both are recognised as leading scholars on Tonga’s political and constitutional history, occasionally I found myself at odds with the views Campbell held on the future of Tonga’s democracy. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, Campbell’s severe criticism of King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou VI and effusive praise of King George Tupou V seemed to be somewhat misguided. In my view, both Kings played roles in shaping the tides of democracy, but neither was solely responsible for either inhibiting or bringing about a democratic Tonga. Powles, however, had a more balanced way of describing the role of the Kings, and the democracy movement, and particularly its leader ‘Akilisi Pohiva. His argument was that Tonga became a democracy because of a number of pressure points which were caused by a range of key players, with no one person able to claim the ‘credit’. Still, the extensive scholarship by both Campbell and Powles have been instrumental in enabling me to develop my own deeper arguments about the impact of democracy on the monarchy, and the role of the monarchy in a twenty-first-century democratic Tonga.

New material

In undertaking a project that seeks to understand the relationship between kinship and kingship in Tonga—a project that draws on a wide range of pre-existing scholarly work—I have also had the opportunity to bring together information documented in a more complete way, and new material that adds to a growing if limited literature on
Tonga. For example, in researching each of the six Tupou monarchs, I could not find in the literature a complete list that included all their dates of birth. So I created one of my own using the various references available to me (see Table 1). I then decided to add their dates of death (where relevant), and then the full names of each of them before they inherited more senior titles (Crown Prince, King, etc.). Then to make the list more complete, I included the current Crown Prince and his eldest son to show the Tupou line into the future. This timeline is one of a number of examples of material that I have drawn together in my thesis that I hope will make it easier for future researchers on the Tongan monarchy and government (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Dates</th>
<th>Significant Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. 1797</td>
<td>Tāufaʻāhau, Tupou Maekafa Ngininginiofolanga (later King Tupou I) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 December 1845</td>
<td>King Tupou I officially installed Tuʻi Kanokupolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 June 1874</td>
<td>Tāufaʻāhau (later King Tupou II) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Tongan Constitution promulgated, King Tupou I officially becomes King of all of Tonga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February 1893</td>
<td>King Tupou I dies / King Tupou II reign begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 March 1893</td>
<td>King Tupou II crowned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March 1893</td>
<td>King Tupou II installed as Tuʻi Kanokupolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 March 1900</td>
<td>Princess Sālote Mafileʻo Piloʻlevu born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April 1918</td>
<td>King Tupou II dies / Queen Sālote Tupou III reign begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 October 1918</td>
<td>Queen Sālote installed as Tuʻi Kanokupolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 October 1918</td>
<td>Queen Sālote crowned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July 1918</td>
<td>Prince Siaosi Tāufaʻāhau Tupoulahi (later King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May 1948</td>
<td>Prince Siaosi Tāufaʻāhau Manumataongo Tukuʻaho (later King George Tupou V) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 July 1959</td>
<td>Prince ‘Ahoʻeitu ‘Umuakiʻotonga Tukuʻaho (later King Tupou VI) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 December 1965</td>
<td>Queen Sālote Tupou III dies / King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV reign begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May 1966</td>
<td>Prince Siaosi Tāufaʻāhau Manumataongo Tukuʻaho becomes Crown Prince Tupoutoʻa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 September 1985</td>
<td>Prince Siaosi Manumataongo ʻAlaivahamamaʻo ʻAhoʻeitu Konstantin Tukuʻaho (late Prince ʻUlukalala) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 September 2006</td>
<td>King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV dies / King George Tupou V reign begins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Timeline showing key life events of the Tupou dynasty
Source. Constructed by author from interviews and archives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 September 2006</td>
<td>Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata becomes Crown Prince Tupouto’a (with his two sons being installed with the ‘Ulukalala and Ata titles at the same ceremony on 27 September 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July 2008</td>
<td>King George Tupou V installed Tu’i Kanokupolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 August 2008</td>
<td>King George Tupou V crowned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2012</td>
<td>King George Tupou V dies / King Tupou VI reign begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 March 2012</td>
<td>Prince ‘Ulukalala becomes Crown Prince Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 May 2013</td>
<td>Prince Tāufa’āhau Manumataongo Tuku’aho born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 June 2015</td>
<td>King Tupou VI installed Tu’i Kanokupolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July 2015</td>
<td>King Tupou VI crowned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thesis outline**

This thesis is made up of eight chapters. After the Prologue and this first introductory chapter (Chapter One), I move on to situate Tongan kingship in relation to other Pacific models of leadership, governance and monarchy. In Chapter Two I also consider the role of Christianity and its significant impact both on Tongan kingship and Tongan kinship. This chapter explains how intricately connected Christianity is with Tonga’s kinship and kingship systems.

Chapter Three discusses what has essentially evolved into a three-tiered Tongan class system of King and royals, nobles and commoners. This chapter explores key concepts that underpin Tongan sociality such as *fahu*, the superior position of the women/women’s line within a family, *anga fakatonga*, the Tongan way, *mana* (spiritual prestige or power), and *tapu*, (sacredness). These concepts are further explained by the use of stories from my fieldwork.

In Chapter Four, I look at the life of King George Tupou V, whose short reign ended in March 2012 and, as earlier noted, coincided with my beginning this PhD topic. This chapter considers the role of the King both as a person and as a symbol of what Tongan identity has become. It examines the relationship between the King and the
people using symbols from the life (and death) of Tupou V, through a number of artworks by Tongans, as lenses through which to explore the complexities and subtleties around kingship that aredistinctively Tongan.

Chapter Five disrupts the narrative flow since it was a late addition that came only after I realised that many of my interlocutors were talking about the role of the Queen consort. I see this chapter, which focuses on the current Queen consort, Queen Nanasipau’u and her role, as a reminder that my research is a partnership with interlocutors apropos the gender dynamics of monarchy. This chapter explores the status of the Queen consort in Tonga, and makes the argument that for kingship to be fully functional in the eyes of Tongan people, the role of a Queen consort is pivotal.

In Chapter Six, I build on the rich body of literature on Tongan transnationalism and the argument that Tonga is not a small and insignificant group of islands in the vast Pacific Ocean, but a growing group of people, interactions, exchanges and ideas. There are challenges in the contemporary development of a Tongan identity, the connection Tongans in the diaspora have to their homeland and how Tongan practices are maintained by them. There is a strong argument that Tongans are still a distinct group of people with a shared heritage and identity that connects and binds them to Tonga. This chapter suggests that just as Tonga’s population is growing, Tonga’s kinship system is also expanding, and therefore, so too is the role of the King. It argues that this broadening kingship is intricately connected to Tonga’s expanding kinship networks.

Chapter Seven situates Tonga’s modern political system in context and demonstrates how the traditional structures of governance under a monarchy are able to exist side-by-side with democracy. I have called this chapter ‘From Tu’i to Tu’a’ signifying what I see as a radical transformation in the shift of power from the King to the people. Responding to some scholars and interlocutors who argued that Tonga cannot truly be a democracy with the monarchy as it is, I argue that not only can the monarchy and democracy coexist harmoniously, but that Tonga evinces a thriving
modern, Pacific-styled democracy that maintains a respect for its traditional kinship hierarchy.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion of my thesis, argues that Tonga is not ruled by a King, and never has been. Tonga is governed first and foremost by a kinship system that underpins all social interactions. The King is but one of many layers of this kinship system and each layer is interconnected and interdependent. This final chapter concludes the thesis by examining the main argument of this work: that Tonga is not governed by kingship, it is governed by kinship.
Chapter Two

Situating Tongan Kingship

In order to understand Tongan kingship, the context within which it sits must be explored. Within Oceania, Tonga has a unique history in that it has maintained its independence and was never formally colonised in the way each of its neighbouring Island states were. While many Tongans are proud to point this out as something that makes Tonga stand out in the region, the other reality is that Tonga, like all of its immediate neighbours, experienced significant change in the early 1800s as a result of the arrival and spread of Christianity by European missionaries. This process was essentially a colonising of the mind and today it is apparent that the impact of Christianity on Tongan culture and people has been profound.

But, Tonga has a history spanning undefined centuries of interaction with other Oceanic peoples that is still only truly being uncovered. Interesting studies are finding new information that tells us of the earliest movement of Tongan peoples. Genome-wide DNA data from the remains of three individuals from Vanuatu (approximately 3,100–2,700 years old) and one from Talasiu, Tongatapu, Tonga (about 2,700–2,300 years old), for example, were analysed by Pontus Skoglund et al. (2016) with data from 778 living East Asian and Oceanian peoples. As they argued,

Our finding that the ancient individuals had little to no Papuan ancestry implies that later human population movements spread Papuan ancestry through the South Pacific after the first peopling of the islands.


Skoglund et al. (2016) found that the ancient remains of the individuals from Tonga and Vanuatu were similar to ancient Taiwanese peoples. The Tongan individual carried little or no Papuan ancestry, providing unambiguous confirmation that the ancestral population of Polynesians was not fully formed or widespread by the end of the Lapita period...the ancient individuals from Vanuatu and Tonga descended from an ancestral (presumably Lapita).43

Their model of population history provides information on the movement of peoples in the Polynesian and Oceanic region in the deep past (Figure 6).

The model shows how people moved through Tonga and the Oceanic region:

b. Population movements more than 40,000 years ago when humans arrived in the Australia–New Guinea region (blue shading) and mixed with Denisovans (brown arrow).

c. A model of events before 3,000 years ago, in which the First Remote Oceanian population formed by spread of a population of East Asian peoples, to Vanuatu and Tonga, and experienced little or no mixture with Papuans along the journey (red shading).

d. A model of populations of mixed Papuan–First Remote Oceanian ancestry in Near Oceania less than 3,000 years ago in a patchwork of islands with different proportions of First Remote Oceanian ancestry (pink shading).

e. A model of secondary expansion of admixed populations bringing Papuan ancestry into Remote Oceania, which was still not complete in Tonga by the date of the Talasiu individual.44


44 Ibid., p. 513.
Figure 6. Population history of Oceania


These findings open up new ideas of peoples in and around Tonga who have been intermixing for many centuries. What is known, is that as one of the more
hierarchical cultures in Oceania (see Chapter Three), Tonga has placed great value on the relationship of its chiefs with neighbouring chiefly families. Tonga is the only surviving monarchy in the Pacific and this status has seen Tonga influenced by and connected to other monarchies both in the Asian and Pacific regions and beyond. This chapter will consider how each of these influences and connections have shaped the way Tongan kingship operates. It will begin by looking at the social hierarchy in pre-Christian Tonga and then look at the arrival of Christianity, the speedy conversion of Tongan chiefs, and the effect this had on Tongans and social order in Tonga. Following an analysis of the impact of Christianity on Tongan kingship, this chapter will then consider other chiefly and monarchical systems in the region, starting (because of my own heritage) with the Kingitanga in Aotearoa New Zealand, then the Hawaiian monarchy, including photos of ‘Iolani Palace based on a visit I took there in 2014, and then the Thai monarchy which structurally and hierarchically has a number of similarities to the monarchy in Tonga.

**Pre-Christian Tonga**

Tonga’s first paramount chief, or ruler, was the Tu’i Tonga named ‘Ahoeitu, who was believed to be born of a union between Tangaloa, god of the sky, and a human mother, a Tongan woman named Va’epopua. As such, ‘Ahoeitu was semi-divine, a descendant of Tangaloa and representative of the gods. Meredith Filihia states that in 1842, when the last Tu‘i Tonga converted to Christianity, post-Christian Tonga began, with a loosening of the association between the supernatural Tangaloa, and Tu‘i Tonga. Gods


46 Ibid.

and demi-gods such as Tangaloa and Maui, seen not only in Tonga but across Polynesia, formed the basis of pre-Christian Tonga belief systems.

These Gods included: (1) Tangaloas (Kau Tangaloa) – the highest and most divine god who lived in the solid firmament, called langi (sky), with his children; (2) Hikule‘o – the god of the harvest who resided in the underworld, called Pulotu (Paradise), 3 to guard the spirits of the kings and chiefs.48

Tongan people built ‘god houses’, usually near the dwelling of the chiefs.49

The spiritual realms these figures inhabited included heavens with many skies, where divine beings and the souls of the deceased dwelt. There was a spiritual connection between the living and dead, both through possession known as ‘āvanga or te‘ia, appearances and often through sickness. In pre-Christian Tonga, sickness was attributed to fa‘ahikehe, translated loosely as ‘beings from the other side’ causing the illness. These divine agents varied from those we might call ‘gods’ or the spirits of the deceased.50 In pre-Christian Tonga, sickness could occur if the tapu, or sacred social structure and its rules, was broken, one example being a swelling of the neck due to an incorrect relation to people of a higher ranking than one’s self. The belief in a complex divine, spiritual world, and associated tapu system overseen by deities, demi-gods and gods, structured life for pre-Christian Tongan people.

Other Tongan beliefs included the concept that humans held divine powers. For example, Niel Gunson notes a person known as Fonokitangata, who lived in central Tongatapu, who was believed to have powers to travel over extraordinary distances.
while also transporting objects. For Tongan people, these beliefs structured daily life. Contact with Pulotu, where souls of chiefs were believed to live in the afterlife, for example, was believed possible in cemeteries. As Filihia explained, ‘The practice of visiting the cemetery when someone is ill seems to have continued uninterrupted from the pre-Christian era to the present day’.

In pre-Christian Tonga, foods would be left for those who had passed away and for other demi-gods and deities, such as the fertility deity Hikule‘o. Essentially this was due to the belief that commoners had no souls, (only the king and the chiefs had souls), so the responsibility of others was simply to worship and make sacrifices to the gods, while serving the king and chiefs. Tongan ancestral religion was thus completely inseparable from serving the kings and chiefs. Finau Pila ‘Ahio tells us:

Each chief and his people had their own gods, and the chief was believed to have mana or supernatural power given by the gods according to their own good will. Failure to perform religious duties and to honour the gods would cause war, famine, epidemics, diseases, and death. Offerings were made on important occasions, and the gods were consulted … Tāufaʻāhau had two gods, who lived in the sea, named Haehaetahi and Tāufa‘itahi.

Siosiane Bloomfield further describes how illness or other forms of discomfort could be seen as punishment or warnings from ‘the supernaturals to individuals to abide within

52 Filihia, ‘Shamanism in Tonga: An assessment’.
53 Ibid., pp. 388–89.
the norms of society’. The deity Hikule‘o was considered the ruler of the afterlife, and to have the power of restoring the dead back to life, so keeping her favour was of great importance. Other deities were known to shape-shift, as in the case of Fehuluni who would take form as a kingfisher. Illness or pain could also be a message from a deceased loved one, calling for care or paying respect at the cemetery, often described as mahaki faka-Tonga or ‘Tongan sicknesses’. One such resolution included exhuming bodies to check there were no stones or sticks pressed against the bones of loved ones in their graves. Tamar Gordon notes that Tongan cemeteries continue their place in Tonga today as powerful parallel zones, where ‘the concerns and activities of the dead mirror those of the living’. There is evidence to suggest that Tongan people also carved sacred objects in the image of the deities and gods, objects which they quickly cast away with the arrival of Christianity to the Tongan Islands.

Thomas West, one of the early missionaries, offers this scathing observation of pre-Christian Tonga:

The religion of the Tongans incorporated no abstract principles of belief … [It was] a system of despotism, in which deities, ceremonies, and restrictions, had been indefinitely multiplied, till it presented a chaos of dark superstition … It abounded in

57 Filihia, ‘Shamanism in Tonga: An assessment’.
punishments for the present life and in dark threatenings for the future … the Tongan Paradise, was reserved only for the spirits of the departed chiefs and persons of rank.\textsuperscript{60}

It was Tongan pre-Christian thought that when chiefs and kings reached paradise after death, their souls would transform into gods, returning to earth as living creatures, including lizards, sharks or carved pieces of wood (see Figure 7).\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7}
\caption{Carved wood. Label on back reads: ‘Goddess of Lefuga hung by Tāufaʻāhau on embracing Christianity, Hapai, July, 1830’}
\end{figure}


As Tongan people embraced Christianity they rejected their traditional religious sculptures, often discarding them, hanging or breaking them, or in some cases giving


\textsuperscript{61} ‘Ahio, ‘Christianity and Tāufaʻāhau in Tonga: 1800–1850’.
them to the missionaries. The Reverend John Thomas kept journals of this period, where he notes the discarding of Tongan objects of veneration, in line with Tongan beliefs:

Looking to the side of the house five wooden images were seen suspended by their necks, side by side, on the King being asked if he had been hanging the gods he replied Yes he had hung them up that his friends may see that they were dead. He had some thought he said of taking them to the large house where divine service is performed. He was informed it may be well to do so and pile them on a heap there as vanquished false gods.

Such pre-Christian wooden sculptures were thus not just religious objects but were thought to be animated by the gods dwelling within.

**The arrival of Christianity**

‘Ahio states that prior to the arrival of Wesleyan missionaries in the 1820s, Tongan traditional religion had already lost its domination over the lives of the people, especially among some of the most powerful chiefs. The main reason for this lay in the civil war, when god-houses and sanctuaries were destroyed, and burnt down.

This enabled missionaries to convert the Tongan people with more ease than previous missionaries had faced. They were supported strongly by Tupou I, who became a champion of the Wesleyan faith after he and his wife Lupepau’u were baptised (he was given the name Siaosi (George), and she Salote (Charlotte) by the Reverend John

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Thomas in 1830.\textsuperscript{65} To give context, a brief timeline of Christianity arriving in Tonga is presented in Table 2.\textsuperscript{66}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1643</td>
<td>Explorer Abel Tasman visits Tongatapu, ‘Eua, and Nomuka, in the southern part of Ha’apai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650</td>
<td>Mataeleha’amea, the Tu’i Kanokupolu, established the supremacy of his dynasty after a war against the Tu’i Ha’atakalaua, Vaea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>James Cook arrives in Tonga, describing it as the ‘Friendly Islands’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>Cook returns for a third time to Tonga and meets with the Tu’i Kanokupolu Tu’i‘halafatai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1797</td>
<td>Ten London Missionary Society missionaries arrive on Tongatapu. Tongan people do not give up their traditional beliefs and Christianity does not take hold in the Tongan islands. Tāufa‘āhau is born in Tonga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Aleamotu’a takes the role Tu’i Kanokupolu while conflict continues in the islands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist Mission pioneer, Walter Lawry, arrives in the islands and attempts to convert the Tongan people but abandons the mission fourteen months later, due to his wife’s failing health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>The second Wesleyan Methodist Mission party arrives in Hihifo (Niuatoputapu—one of Tonga’s northern most islands) Missionary Rev. John Thomas arrives in Tonga, where he will stay for twenty-five years. Aleamotu’a (Tu’i Kanokupolu) is converted to Christianity. Wesleyan missionaries are given permission to live on Tongatapu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Tāufa‘āhau I declares himself Tonga’s first King, George Tupou I. Tāufa‘āhau is baptised by Wesleyan missionaries and dedicates the Kingdom of Tonga to the Christian God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>A period sometimes referred to as the ‘Pentecost of Tonga’ whereby Tongans, as a whole, embraced Christianity. Many observations of Christian revival appear within missionary papers and documents. People gave their lives to Jesus Christ en masse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>George Tupou I introduces the first written code of laws in the country, known as ‘The Vava’u Code’ at Neiafu, the first step toward Tonga becoming a truly Christian State, limiting the power of chiefs and embedding Christianity within law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>George Tupou I unifies the islands of Tonga.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
George Tupou I holds court at Nuku'alofa, and makes law by public and regal authority, the 1850 code. This code consolidated his position as King, and set down laws on adultery, the non-sale of Tongan land, abortion and other matters informed by Christianity.

1875
Tonga’s Constitution promulgated. References to God’s will in Part I Section 1.

1882
Another group of Wesleyan missionaries arrive. Many more Tongan people convert to Wesleyan Christianity.

1893
George Tupou I passes away. George Tupou II (Siaosi Tāufaʻāhau) succeeds him as King.

1900
The Treaty of Friendship is signed with Britain. Tonga becomes a self-governing British protectorate.

1970
Tonga regains independence from Britain.

Table 2. A timeline of Christianity in Tonga

As can be seen, Tongan Christianity spread rapidly for several reasons. The primary reason was that, for the first time, commoners had hope for life after death, irrespective of their social status. The second reason was the weakening of traditional religion, due to the ongoing conflict between the pre-Christian dynasties and their different gods.

Because of the strong influence of pre-Christian beliefs in Tonga, even the Christian church was structured in the same way: hierarchically. The pre-Christian social structure of Tonga has continued to influence the way social structures function in Christian Tonga. In the past the hierarchy was loosely organised as follows:

1. Tu‘i – The king, the first Tu‘i Tonga being a direct descendant of the god Tangaloa;
2. Ha‘a Tu‘i – kings – the upper class of the three dynasties, and their families;
3. Hou‘eiki – the chiefs, as families and relatives of the king, who owned their own districts and people. Originally, they were brothers of the first king, ‘Aho‘eitu;
4. Kau Mu‘a – gentlemen, sons of a union between a chief and Matāpule;
5. Ha’a Matāpule – chief attendants, who carried out orders and acted as spokesmen for the Hou‘eiki;
6. Kau Tu‘a or kakai – commoners, people with no relationship to the king, who provided for the needs of the chiefs;
7. **Hopoate or Kau Pōpula** – slaves, people with no freedom.\(^6^7\)

A similar hierarchical structure was continued in the Church after Christianity was introduced. Tu'ipulotu Tongia explains:

In the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, where the royal family, chiefs, government officials and church leaders attend, the king is on the highest stage on the right hand of the pulpit, the chiefs are next and below the king, the international diplomats and government officials are opposite the king/chiefs (on the front left of the pulpit), and the choir and people are on the main floor facing the pulpit.\(^6^8\)

**Kingitanga**

Although a large group of Māori chiefs signed a Treaty with the British Crown in 1840 forming a partnership between the Māori chiefs and the Crown, Aotearoa New Zealand was colonised by the British and now has a monarch who lives in England, Queen Elizabeth II, who is legally recognised as the Sovereign of New Zealand in the same way King Tupou VI is in Tonga. The difference between the relationship each of these monarchs has to their people is a key theme of this thesis—the Tongan King is first and foremost kin to Tongans, and King second. Queen Elizabeth II could never be described as kin to any Māori.

As a response to the rapidly expanding influence of the British in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori chiefs from varying *iwi* (tribes) and *hapu* (sub-tribes) made a number of attempts in the early to mid-1800s to limit the British impact on Māori, and particularly Māori resources and land. In 1835, thirty-four Māori chiefs from the northern *hapu* of Aotearoa New Zealand signed *He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni*, the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand. This declaration was

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\(^6^8\) Tongia, ‘Gospel of hope for the World of hopeless’, p. 23.
made to the then British Resident, James Busby, and was an active effort by the chiefs to assert that the mana and sovereignty of Aotearoa New Zealand remained with Māori chiefs, while also acknowledging that the British were a powerful people who had the ability to help Māori protect their land from other foreign forces. Years later a small group of chiefs from iwi and hapu further south of the initial thirty-four signatories also signed the Declaration, including a senior chief from what is now known as Hawkes Bay, Te Hapuku, and also Te Wherowhero of Waikato.69

The British Resident considered the Declaration a positive sign because it showed that Māori chiefs were able to unite in ways that the British had not previously seen, but while he acknowledged the Declaration it was never taken seriously and when the recently appointed British lieutenant governor William Hobson was appointed in late 1839 his focus was on developing a Treaty, which was first signed on 6 February 1840. This Treaty, signed first at Waitangi in the far north of Aotearoa New Zealand by around forty Māori chiefs, was ultimately agreed to by over 500 chiefs from across the land and is still recognised today as a valid and living agreement despite numerous breaches by the Crown over many decades. Māori and the Crown have long clashed over these breaches and there have been different attempts by Māori to respond to the Crown, including: in direct battle when Crown forces attempted to move Māori off their lands; in petitions to the British monarch; and in the establishment of pan-Māori organisations/institutions. One such institution is the Kīngitanga (the Māori King movement, kīngi being the Māori transliteration of ‘king’). The Kīngitanga is a movement of people headed by the Arikinui (paramount chief), who descends from the

first Māori ‘King’, Potatau Te Wherowhero of Waikato, who was selected at a meeting of chiefs of iwi Māori (Māori tribes) in 1857 and installed officially in 1858.\textsuperscript{70}

Kiingitanga is a movement of the people where the leader was effectively chosen by consensus rather than by a majority vote, or by battle. The head of the Kiingitanga is sort of like the symbolic head of Māoridom rather than a ‘ruler’ or ‘monarch’ in the way the Tongan King is.\textsuperscript{71}

Today, the Tongan King is universally accepted as the head of the country but for Tupou VI to hold his position his ancestor Tupou I had to win many battles to secure his status as King. Violet Taulanga explained,

As someone who grew up in a family supporting Kiingitanga, and now married into a Tongan family, I see some connections in that the Tongan King is also a kinsman to Tongans, and Te Arikinui is also kin to us, but in terms of being a head of state that is where the two differ.\textsuperscript{72}

The Kiingitanga as a movement has endured in Aotearoa New Zealand for 160 years now, but its position is different to that of the Tongan monarchy, and, given the place of the British-born Queen Elizabeth II, its ability to exercise power over the day-to-day affairs of Aotearoa New Zealand is limited to how influential the movement, and its leaders, can be over its own members and through them over the affairs of state. Although the Aotearoa New Zealand story is very different to that of Tonga, over the last century the Tongan royals and the Kiingitanga leadership have become close, with both families maintaining close ties by meeting at key events throughout the year (see Figure 8).


\textsuperscript{71} Interview with Violet Taulanga, no. 1, June 2014.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
Hawai‘i

Unlike the Kingitanga in Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai‘i had a monarchical system of government for 100 years after Kamehameha the Great (or Kamehameha I, the Conqueror) unified the Hawaiian Archipelago in the early 1800s. Paul D’Arcy has very recently published a text on the unification of the Hawaiian Islands (2018), but unfortunately I have not been able to review this material in time for inclusion in this thesis. In order to provide context, a brief selection of key points in the history of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i have been summarised for the reader (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Kamehameha I, through conquest and diplomacy, unites the Hawaiian archipelago, and the Hawaiian Kingdom is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>The first American Missionaries arrive in Hawai‘i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>The First Hawaiian Constitution is enacted by Kamehameha III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Mahele (land division) and the first private ownership of land occurs in Hawai‘i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Kamehameha IV becomes King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Kamehameha V becomes King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>William Lunalilo (grandnephew of Kamehameha I, and cousin to Kamehameha V) is elected King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>King Lunalilo dies, and David Kalākaua is elected King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>During Kalākaua’s reign, he constructs and completes the Hawaiian ‘Iolani Palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Kalākaua dies, and his sister, Queen Liliʻuokalani (Hawaii’s last reigning monarch) takes the throne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>A cartel of Pro-American missionaries and businessmen overthrow the monarchy and attempt annexation of Hawaii to the United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>An attempt to restore Queen Liliʻuokalani to the throne fails, she and her supporters are arrested leading to her abdicating the throne under duress. The Queen commenced her English translation of the Kumulipo. This text today is a key text for the regeneration of Hawaiian forms of sovereign relating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Hawaii becomes annexed to the United States, and two years later a formal US territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Statehood through Admissions Act of US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Key points in the history of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i

Within fewer than 100 years, the previously dispersed peoples and polities of the Hawaiian Islands were united by Kamehameha I, led as a kingdom under a sole *Ali‘i* (paramount chief), and converted in huge numbers to Christianity. Then, they were led by a King who was not monarch solely through a dynastic genealogy but was elected. These enormous changes were significant to the Kanaka Maoli people, not only politically and socially, but also spiritually. As Jonathan K.K. Osorio states,

Fifty years previously … it would have been inconceivable that Ali‘i (the traditional ruling families and original members of the House of Nobles in the kingdom’s first constitution) could be elected by human beings. As descendants of chiefly families whose rank equated them with akua (gods), and as akua themselves, they surely were
not chosen by the people … it was inconceivable that … Kānaka Maoli would have been able to koho (choose or elect) someone to be Ali‘i.\footnote{Jonathan K.K. Osorio, Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002, p. 2.}

As in many Pacific cultures, Hawai‘i and its surrounding islands were, for many centuries, governed by chieftainship, kinship and genealogy being the basis of chiefly lineage with high ranking chiefs (Ali‘i nui) also acknowledged as being of divine lineage.\footnote{Stacy Kamehiro, The Arts of Kingship, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009, p. 3. DOI: 10.21313/hawaii/9780824832636.001.0001.} Osorio expands:

Members of the Kamehameha chiefly line occupied the kingship, a lineage recognized as holding sacred mana, or power, originating to a great extent from its founder, Kamehameha the Conqueror … [Kamehameha] brought Kaua‘i and the neighbouring island of Ni‘ihau into his domain and signaled the unification of the major islands of the Hawaiian archipelago under a single, centralized rule. Thus began the kingdom of Hawai‘i.\footnote{Ibid.}

American Congregational missionaries began converting Kanaka Maoli people from the late 1810s. Hawai‘i’s monarchy, based on Ali‘i genealogy, like Tonga, was deeply impacted by the arrival of Christianity. Not only were native Hawaiian beliefs and practices condemned and prohibited, but the social status of those of commoner or ordinary genealogy was completely changed. With the spread of Christianity, the social and spiritual structures of Hawai‘i were altered dramatically. Osorio describes how Hawaiians of ‘low rank’, through commitment to the newly accepted religion, could be elevated to a position of influence which in the past would have been impossible.
Like many of the Ali‘i Nui who placed their faith in the political as well as the spiritual possibilities of the new religion … mana (power) came to be based on the [Christian] … mission.76

Adoption of Western education delivered by the mission schools had similar effects. Osorio argues that the rapid adoption of Christianity in Hawai‘i also occurred, in part, due to the unsettling of the spiritual balance that had been carefully protected for generations by Hawaiian practices being upheld. The church became an institution promising life when death was everywhere, leading to the eventual conversion of Hawaiians by the thousands.77 Pono (balance/harmony), the relationship that underpinned all of Hawaiian life through akua (gods) and through social practices and hierarchical genealogically determined relationships, was forever altered.

Pono was … maintained for centuries by the ritual separation of men and women known as ‘Aikapu (sacred eating) … [which] linked them as well as the Ali‘i into a relationship with the powerful gods … it was the Ali‘i whose presence and disciplined behaviours also guaranteed that the akua would continue to bless the endeavours of the people.78

However, in 1819, shortly after the death of Kamehameha I, the sacred eating practice of ‘Aikapu was abandoned, irreparably damaging the spiritual belief system underpinning Hawaiian society. Osorio explains:

Less than six months after the devout Conqueror’s [Kamehameha I] bones were hidden away, his sons and heirs … sat with their mother … and the Kuhina Nui, Ka‘ahumanu

76 Osorio, Dismembering Lāhui, p. 9.

77 Ibid., pp. 11–12.

78 Ibid.
... and ate together, breaking the ‘Aikapu … [reducing] chiefly relatives to the status of human beings, no longer a divinity.\textsuperscript{79}

With \textit{pono} broken by men and women eating together [known as ‘\textit{Ainoa}], Hawaiian society began to wither. The timing of this event with the arrival of American Protestant missionaries, led to rapid social change. Diana Looser tells us that although the spread of Christianity missionary teaching throughout the Pacific can be understood to have had a profound effect on the region as a whole, in Hawai‘i’s case this cross-cultural moment was rendered even more pivotal by the historical chance that the arrival of the first missionaries in 1820 occurred only months after Ka‘ahumanu, the \textit{kuhina nui} (queen regent) … had broken the \textit{kapu} system (structure of privileges and taboos), fracturing the religious, social and political order. This … along with Ka‘ahumanu’s conversion to Christianity in 1825, dictated Hawai‘i’s fortunes to a considerable extent … the choice of Christian religion as a system to replace the abolished order.\textsuperscript{80}

After \textit{kapu} had been broken, a social malaise enabled missionaries to promise the rescue of the Hawaiian people and their chiefs by introducing a new commitment and discipline – namely Christian prohibitions, which were understood to replace the old \textit{kapu}, the rules that had once demarcated the sacred distinctions between chiefs and people, men and women.\textsuperscript{81}

The same \textit{Kuhina Nui} who participated in ‘\textit{Ainoa} went on to align with the Missionary board, and initiated new laws based on Christian teachings (known as prohibitionary or sumptuary laws) in Hawai‘i. These new laws not only altered traditional morality and

\textsuperscript{79} Osorio, \textit{Dismembering Lāhui}, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{81} Osorio, \textit{Dismembering Lāhui}, p. 11.
custom, but also were seen by some to have contributed to the Natives’ abnegation of their own culture and values as well as in their reliance on foreigners to tell them what was *pono*.\(^\text{82}\)

By 1853 almost the entire Kanaka Maoli population had affiliation with Christianity of some kind.\(^\text{83}\) Christian practices were instilled by missionaries through churches, and through their delivery of Western, English education to young Kanaka Maoli, who quickly grew up, educated in the ways of the missionaries. They developed political understandings that allowed them to take unforeseen leadership positions in a society once ruled and structured by genealogy. ‘Civilising’ Kanaka Maoli and converting them to Christianity was seen as necessary to save what many missionaries believed was a dying culture. This ‘pending extinction’ of Kanaka Maoli culture was conveyed to Hawaiian people, chiefs and students in mission schools, further heightening the apparent need for Christian salvation and a turning away from the old ways of being, including cultural practices such as *hula*. 

Within less than a century, the remaining *Ali‘i Nui* had little choice, with a large non-Indigenous population and new class of Western-educated Kanaka Maoli, but to adapt politically, to

\begin{quote}
achieve the respect of foreign residents and their governments for Hawaiian laws … it was individuals … with no outstanding genealogy but acclaimed by haole [white] missionaries for their knowledge and leadership, who were called upon by the people to represent them … a very different elite from the chiefs of old.\(^\text{84}\)
\end{quote}

A democratic government was established in Hawai‘i, still controlled by the monarch and chiefs, but with it a complete overhaul of the *Ali‘i* leadership that had

\(^{82}\) Ibid.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., p. 18.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., p. 23.
existed for centuries. In order for the new Christian system to fully be embraced, missionaries deployed education as a tool to convert, educate and politically prepare young Natives for leadership within a Christian Hawai‘i.

Figure 9. Copy of letter from King Kalākaua to King George Tupou I
Source. David Kalākaua to George Tupou I, 23 December 1886, Letter, Hawai‘i State Archives, Digital Collections

This important letter not only demonstrates the strong bonds of friendship between the Hawaiian and Tongan Kingdoms, but also of their mutual goals of continued independence. Kalakaua also notes Tongan and Hawaiian peoples being
‘allied by blood’—a powerful marker of the similarities shared by both peoples, and their kinship and kingship systems (Figure 9).

New access to leadership: An elected king

As ali‘i genealogy became less and less the only way to gain access to high-ranking positions, so too did the chiefly genealogy lose currency as the only way to become monarch in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. King Kalākaua was the first King from outside the Kamehameha chiefly line to occupy the throne, as the second elected Hawai‘ian King in 1874. Kamehiro writes extensively on the impact of Kalākaua’s reign on Hawaiian society and history, describing how he used a variety of symbols, including Western and European symbols, to assert the Hawaiian Kingdom’s past, present and future status as an independent state:

[Many] symbols … displayed in contexts such as coronations, palaces and legislative assemblies, [while] others, such as state architecture, crowns, thrones, and figurative memorials, derived from Western sources. Many of the King’s critics dismissed the latter as evidence of Kalākaua’s love for extravagant display and desire to imitate Western rulers … [some] described the Hawaiian nation as a ‘pygmy kingdom’ and mocked Kalākaua’s pains to ‘ape European royalty.’ Yet one cannot describe Kalākaua’s efforts as mere mimicry. His was not an insipid copycat modernist nationalism ‘traditionalized’ or ‘Hawaiianized’ through the nostalgic use of visual markers of the Native past … but rather a processual unfolding of Native Hawai‘ian conceptions of chieftliness and modern rulership.85

Such symbols of Kingship (crowns, thrones, memorials and so on) were used by Kalākaua to ‘maintain sovereignty and forge recognition in the international

community" while also representing markers of a nation that was changing, due to colonization and the influence of outside cultures that were inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands during his rule. One of the ways Kalākaua ensured the survival of the Kingdom, for as long as he did, was to continue the ingenuity that marks the histories of many Pacific nations, by adopting and adapting new technologies and materials for purposes suited to them. In this way, his reign is similar to that of the most recent Tongan monarchs, who also have adopted and adapted Western symbols of power, royalty and wealth to ensure their own survival as a kingdom. As described, for many generations, it was through genealogy that the monarch secured power, along with the divine and godly status of the monarchy or Aliʻi, who followed careful cultural practices to ensure that the pono and sacred link between the royal line and the gods remained strong. With the breaking of such practices, new symbols and ways of showing and performing leadership and elevated status were required by the Hawaiian monarch. With strong Western influences and the modern ability to travel, symbols were adopted by Kalākaua in particular, such as the building of a palace, to demonstrate and enact his position, and that of the Hawaiian Kingdom in relation to other international monarchies. Kamehiro wrote,

In Hawaiʻi, as in Polynesian chiefdoms like Tahiti and Tonga, indigenous rulers used foreign goods and technologies to consolidate their political domains … [Kalākaua] fashioned his court in regal style, incorporating European military emblems, royal symbols, fine Western furnishings, and the etiquette of St James, and housed his court in a modern palace … These costly and conspicuous displays paralleled chiefs’ adoption of Western goods and practices earlier in the century to appropriate foreign mana. The concept of mana and the way it was attached to certain foreign materials and

86 Ibid.
practices was key to these exchanges … it demonstrated their capacity to properly channel the mana of the gods (akua); to foreigners, it demonstrated their divinity.\textsuperscript{87}

While the use of royal symbols and regalia may have served the purpose of securing the position of the Hawai‘ian monarchy and sovereign kingdom, other Western practices were also accepted and appropriated for more practical purposes, alongside the revival of traditional Hawaiian practices such as \textit{hula}. Kamanamaikalani Beamer and Kaeo Duarte discuss how a Western tool, electricity, was adopted by Kalākaua. Efforts were made by the \textit{Mo‘i} (King) Kalākaua (1874–1891) to make Hawai‘i’s palace the first seat of government in the world to make use of electricity. Kalākaua … also challenged missionary assumptions of morality and promoted traditions like \textit{mele} (song), \textit{oli} (chant), \textit{hula} (dance) and \textit{mo`oku `auhau} (genealogy) that link ’O iwi to their metaphysics …When Kalākaua befriended Thomas Edison and took advantage of the power of electricity, did Hawaiians gazing at the illuminated palace on a moonless night marvel at his industriousness or simply regard it as a Western imposition?\textsuperscript{88}

‘Iolani Palace, which had electricity even before the White House did,\textsuperscript{89} holds a significant historical legacy that gives insight into the adoption of Western technologies by a ruling monarch, toward securing the place of a Pacific Kingdom, and provides an excellent comparison to the \textit{Palasi} (palace) in Tonga.

\textsuperscript{87} Kamehiro, \textit{The Arts of Kingship}, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 73.

\textsuperscript{89} As explained to me by the tour guide at ‘Iolani Palace.
The Palace and the Palasi

‘Iolani Palace in Honolulu, once the seat of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s ruling monarchy … was the site of key moments of the onslaught to the Kingdom’s sovereignty as well as of resistance against these infringements.\(^\text{90}\)

‘Iolani Palace was built in 1879, although not officially completed until 1882. The palace that exists today is not the original, but the second building to sit on its grounds. The previous home, built in 1844 by a Hawaiian chief and later sold to King Kamehameha III as an official residence, was called Hale Ali‘i\(^\text{91}\) until the reign of Kamehameha V, who renamed it ‘Iolani Palace. During the rebuilding of the palace, American architects worked toward an American Florentine style.\(^\text{92}\) However the interior fittings and furnishings were mostly chosen by King Kalākaua himself, who selected many items for the palace while travelling overseas. Having grown up learning that Hawai‘i was once a kingdom governed by the tangata whenua of that place,\(^\text{93}\) much like Tonga is today, I had often wondered what happened, and how this Pacific cousin of ours became the fiftieth state of America.

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\(^{91}\) ‘House of Chiefs’ in the native Hawai‘ian language.

\(^{92}\) As explained to me by the tour guide at ‘Iolani Palace, December 2014.

\(^{93}\) *Tangata whenua* is the Māori phrase for ‘people of the land’.
Visiting ʻIolani Palace on a trip in December 2014, 121 years after the overthrow of Queen Liliʻuokalani, I was at first struck by the size of the building. At a distance, it seemed small in comparison to the neighbouring Hawaiian buildings. As I walked closer, I realised it was much more immense than I initially thought. During my
visit to the palace, the tour guide explained that Kalākaua travelled wide and far, and in his time was considered the only monarch to have circumnavigated the globe during his reign. As a result, Kalākaua’s input into how the palace looked was also influenced by visits to palaces he had visited on his extensive travels. Kamehiro explains,

Some of the cultural and national projects associated with [Kalākaua's] reign – such as ‘Iolani Palace … have had a lasting impact on Hawaiian communities and are today treasured symbols of Hawaiian culture and history … The King and his advisers devised an array of royal regalia consisting of innovative and ancient forms and displayed them in grand form … together, these insignia of Kalākaua’s chiefly and royal office expressed the legitimacy of his station … [‘Iolani Palace] was designed and spatially situated to mark the modernity of the kingdom and demonstrate the sanctity of the King’s rule.\textsuperscript{94}

While showing our group around, my tour guide emphasised that ‘Iolani Palace was more than just a tourist destination and was of cultural and symbolic importance to Hawaiians. It had long been an ‘emblem of Hawaiian history and political authority since the late nineteenth century, [and] a constant and central fixture in the political and cultural landscape of Honolulu’.\textsuperscript{95} As I walked around the Palace, noting what my tour guide said about the renovations that had taken place and the significant repatriation efforts, part of me wondered if ‘Iolani’s survival was a statement that the Kingdom of Hawai‘i had never truly been overthrown (certainly not legitimately). ‘Iolani Palace was still a royal palace, home to the monarch of a kingdom that (at least in the mind of many Native Hawaiians) still exists today. I thought that, perhaps, by honouring this house, and its original occupants, Hawaiians are keeping their ‘Kingdom’ alive. As Liza Williams and Vernadette Gonzalez wrote,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{94} Kamehiro, The Arts of Kingship, 55.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Despite – and because of – the palace’s restoration, it is also generative of political resistance, particularly for Native Hawaiians. There are... multiple and overlapping investments in ‘Iolani Palace as both museum and tourist attraction...the history of dispossession is appropriated and addressed at ‘Iolani for tourist ‘enjoyment’96

‘Iolani Palace is, as my tour guide pointed out, far more than just a tourist site, but for those whose heritage is so deeply connected with it there is a sad reality that the Palace is now run (and owned, although not necessarily legitimately) by the State of Hawai‘i. All Hawaiians, including the Kanaka Maoli, have to pay to visit it during opening hours. The Palace has an interesting history as a site where a violent history of imperialism was carried out with premeditation, and where it was subsequently smoothed over by narratives of hospitality ... [its] history of dispossession ... a metonym for events in the Kingdom at large. From palace to prison to destination ... [That] Native Hawaiians can access the palace of their monarchy only as tourists demonstrates the alchemy of Hawai‘i’s new plantation economy of tourism, which has converted a palace of a sovereign nation into a tourist destination.97

Hawai‘i Pono‘ī by Puanani Burgess98

On Friday, August 7, 1987
Forty-three kanakas from Wai‘anae
In a deluxe, super-duper, air-conditioned, tinted-glass, tourist-kind bus
Headed to Honolulu on an excursion to the Palace,
‘Iolani Palace ...

Through the polished koa wood doors, with elegantly etched

96 Williams & Gonzalez, ‘Indigeneity, sovereignty, sustainability and cultural tourism’, p. 670.
97 Ibid. p. 670.
Docent Doris ushers us into another Time. Over the carefully polished floors we glide, through the darkened hallways: spinning, sniffing, turning, fingers reaching to touch something sacred, something forbidden—quickly.
Then into the formal dining room, silent now. Table set: the finest French crystal gleaming; spoons, knives, forks, laid with precision next to gold-rimmed plates with the emblem of the King. Silent now.
La‘amea ‘Ū.

I was in that room. Her room. In which she lived and died and composed songs for her people. It was the room in which she composed prayers to a deaf people:
‘Oh honest Americans, hear me for my downtrodden people …’
She stood with me at her window; Looking out on the world, that she would never rule again; Looking out on the world that she would only remember in the scent of flowers; Looking out on a world that once despised her.

And in my left ear, she whispered:
‘E Pua. Remember:

This is not America. And we are not Americans.

_Hawai‘i Pono‘ī._

Puanani Burgess narrates a visit to ‘Iolani Palace in order to contend with the loss of Indigenous political sovereignty, the marginalization of Kanaka Maoli on their own land, and the erosion of Native histories and narratives … [‘Iolani Palace was] once the seat of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s ruling monarchy, which was the site of
key moments of the onslaught to the Kingdom’s sovereignty as well as of resistance against these infringements.\textsuperscript{99}

Burgess purposefully chose ‘Iolani Palace as the subject of a poem that distils a series of political strategies around the preservation and theft of Native Hawaiian sovereignty. According to Williams and Gonzalez, the poem unfolds through a description of a docent-led tour that for Burgess and her companions exceeds a museumized historical tourist narrative … the tour is haunted by the memories of the Hawaiian monarchs that infuse the space and interrupt the packaged narration. Burgess describes the room – the formal dining room, the Queen’s room, the King’s study, the ballroom – peopled by ghostly inhabitants and memories … The tour group rediscovers the textures, sights and smells of their monarchs, and encounter artifacts of a history that transforms their relationship to the palace … we see the tragic losses resulting from settler invasion – the death threats to, and incarceration of, Hawai‘i’s leaders, and a coup d’état backed by military might.\textsuperscript{100}

**The Tongan Palasi**

The Tongan *Palasi* (palace) built in 1867 by Tupou I, has a different history to ‘Iolani Palace, and it is also a very different building architecturally. While it is grand and large, it is made of wood and does not have the same sense of immovability as ‘Iolani. At one stage on my first visit to the *Palasi*, the wind was blowing so strongly it almost seemed as though the building was swaying, a very different feeling to my visit to ‘Iolani Palace.

Tupou I built the *Palasi* as his primary base on Tongatapu, but his main residence in the 1860s was on Ha’apai. He is said to have built the *Palasi* as a ‘symbol

\textsuperscript{99} Williams & Gonzalez, ‘Indigeneity, sovereignty, sustainability and cultural tourism’, p. 670.

\textsuperscript{100} Williams & Gonzalez, ‘Indigeneity, sovereignty, sustainability and cultural tourism’, pp. 670–71.
of a modern Tonga, and demonstrating [his] sophistication and status as the first modern King’ (Figure 12). This is not unlike Kalākaua with ‘Iolani Palace, in that he ‘projected his vision of himself as both an internationally recognised ruler (to counter colonial threats to Hawaiian sovereignty) and an exalted political and religious authority in Hawaiian terms (to address political divisions internal to the Native Hawaiian chiefly community). In ‘Iolani Palace, he fashioned a modern Hawaiian space and structure.'

Figure 12. Tongan Palasi, Nuku‘alofa, Tonga

The Palasi remained unaltered for more than 100 years and up until 1990, a stone wall around a metre in height surrounded the palace grounds, until King Tupou IV had larger fences erected as a security measure, and then Tupou V had solid iron bars installed in the 2000s also, apparently, due to security concerns. The Palasi is not open to the public as ‘Iolani is, mainly because the monarch still resides there, but it is used for a number of key events hosted by the King and members of his family. Figures

101 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.
103 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.
13, 14 and 15 were taken at a kava ceremony I attended in 2012 that was held on the grounds of the Palasi in honour of the King’s daughter, Princess Angelika Lātūfuipeka, for graduating from The Australian National University:

**Figure 13.** Nobles and talking chiefs (*matāpule*) sit on the deck during the kava ceremony

Source. Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho, Facebook. Used with permission.

**Figure 14.** Princess Angelika sits in the doorway of the palace as the person of honour at the kava ceremony at the Palasi, attended to by her assistant Volasinga Salakielu ‘Ahi.  

Source. Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho, Facebook. Used with permission.
While the palasi is primarily a royal residence, it is also the home of the head of the Tongan kinship system and so it has a significance for all Tongans. As Lord Fusitu'a told me in an interview,

The Palace is not important because it is a large and grand building, it is significant because it has long been the primary residence of our monarch, it is a place where countless ceremonies are held and so many key decisions are made. It is the King’s place, but it is also the place where Tongan kingship and its culture are maintained.104

**Thailand: The Tongan monarchy’s ‘closest’ neighbour**

The Thai monarchy in its current form was established around 100 years before the Tupou Dynasty. However, like Tonga, Thailand has had a long history of kings and queens stretching back around 800 years. It is regarded as one of the more hierarchical monarchies still in existence today. The previous King of Thailand, King Bhumibol,

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104 Interview with Lord Fusitu'a, September 2017.
who reigned for over sixty years held an extremely potent rule over Thailand. In photos published in mainstream news media, you can see the level of reverence paid to members of the Thai royal family where in one case even the elected prime minister of Thailand prostrated herself on the floor while speaking with one of the Thai princesses at a public function.

![Figure 16. Thai Prime Minister almost lying down on the floor to show respect to Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, daughter of the then King.](image)


The now deceased Thai King’s eldest daughter, Princess Ubolratana, described the King as ‘the father of all Thais’, and his position was considered sacred. It is said that King George Tupou V enjoyed his association with the Thai royal family because he could relate to the formal and hierarchical.

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105 Princess Ubolratana, speech to Thai Film festival, 3 November 2016, Los Angeles. *Associated Press.*
While Tonga is, of course, closely connected in terms of family and kin to Samoa and Fiji, and even Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai‘i, its monarchical system is closely related to that of Thailand. Indeed, they have both been influenced by the British monarchical systems and that can be seen in the uniforms worn, the ceremonial events and government structures.

In the face of the very real threat of foreign powers taking hold of the Tongan Kingdom, as with the Hawaiian Monarchy, the Tongan Kingdom adopted aspects of British material culture relating to the royal family, including decorative crowns, the construction of a royal palace, Royal Orders and ornate thrones (Figure 18). One interesting adoption of British material culture included the purchase of a London Taxi as the vehicle for the Tongan King (Figure 24). While British material culture was heavily influential on the royal family in Tonga, this did not replace traditional aspects of Tongan culture regarding interaction with the royal family, one example being prostration by people wanting to honour a member of the royal family as seen in Figure 17.

One practice that I noted a couple of times during my attendance at celebratory events in Tonga, was people lying on the ground in front of a royal family member and motioning for the royal to step over them. Not unlike the Thai Prime Minister speaking to the Thai Princess while seated on the floor, this particular practice seemed unusual to me. But when I asked Falekava Kupu about it, he said that it is no different from people who curtsey for Queen Elizabeth, and also that lowering yourself in the presence of a great chief was common in ancient Hawai‘i and Fiji.106

106 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.
The Tongan monarchy has also adopted elements of British royal ceremony and protocol, including the coronation of the monarch and the style of crown (see Figure 18) and ceremonial garments (see Figure 19). Lupepau’u Tuita told me that while it is true there are aspects of the Tongan monarchy that have been adopted from other monarchical systems around the world, there is still a uniquely Tongan flavour to the way things are done in Tonga. In Figure 19, that Tongan flavour is demonstrated by the King wearing an ermine cloak and crown, while walking on a large mat of ngatu. Standing in front of him is his attendant (his niece, Fanetupouvava’u Tu’ivakano) wearing a Western outfit, and seated on the ground wearing her uniform and kiekie is a school student. While that particular image speaks to King George Tupou V’s style as a modern king, it also speaks to Tonga’s connection to a broader global community of monarchies.107

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107 Interview with Lupepau’u Tuita, July 2012.
Figure 18. King George Tupou V being crowned at his Coronation in 2008. A golden throne and golden crown: symbols of power, wealth and independence
Source. Supplied by the Tongan Palace Office and used with permission

Figure 19. Traditional and modern symbols of power: the King in a velvet and ermine cloak, standing on ngatu cloth, 2008
Source. Supplied by the Tongan Palace Office and used with permission
Figure 20. Queen Elizabeth II in front of the Tongan Palace, a symbol of an independent kingdom legitimately recognised by other kingdoms, 1953
Source. Supplied by the Tongan Palace Office and used with permission

Figure 21. The Tongan Palace, with ngatu on the ground and a funerary catafalque for King Taufa’ahau Tupou IV bearing the crown in gold, 2006
Source. Supplied by the Tongan Palace Office and used with permission
Contemporary Tonga: A Christian nation

Lady Eseta Fusitu‘a explained that the important connection between the monarchy and the church in Tonga is deeply rooted in Tongan people’s respect for a higher being. ‘Not only do we recognise that every King since Tupou I has been a Christian, we recognise that the King is a direct descendant of Tangaloa.’ She went on to say that this divine heritage means

Tongans see a natural link between the King and Christianity. They see a naturally harmonious relationship between monarchy and religion. This is why nearly all Tongans are Christian, because Christianity is a core part of our modern identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to situate Tongan kingship in the broader context of the Pacific and beyond. While the close connections with Hawaii and Aotearoa – New Zealand are based on deep historical kinship ties between the peoples of these places, and Tonga, the monarchical traditions in Thailand and Britain have also influenced Tongan kingship. It is important that this thesis, while focussed on Tonga and Tongans, emphasise the role of external influences that have helped shape kingship as it is known in Tonga today.

108 Interview with Lady Eseta Fusitu‘a, July 2012.

109 Ibid.
Chapter Three

Contemporary Tongan Hierarchy, Class and Kingship

It is an intrinsically Tongan thing to know where you stand, to know how you relate to the next person, or the next village. You have to know who is above you and who is below you, and how you are related to these people. In everything you do, you have to remember that your place is part of a big picture in Tonga, and your ancestors and your children experience the same. This has always been the way in Tonga.\(^\text{110}\)

Knowing one’s place in relation to other Tongans, and then behaving appropriately to one’s perceived status, is one of the most important considerations in the everyday life of a Tongan person. Tonga’s highly stratified ‘intrinsically hierarchical society’\(^\text{111}\) has persisted for many centuries, albeit with some transformations. While many of the social-political dynamics are obvious, such as the acceptance that the King is at the pinnacle of society, there are subtleties and complexities that require further explanation in order to understand the place of the King in Tongan society today. Both Helen Lee and Adrienne Kaeppler argue that Tonga’s hierarchical ranking system is ‘the most pervasive concept in Tongan culture’,\(^\text{112}\) one which plays a ‘crucial ... [component] in the construction of individuals’ sense of self’.\(^\text{113}\) This chapter will look at the fixity and fluidity of rank in Tonga, and consider how Tonga’s class system functions while exploring the concepts of \textit{fahu} and \textit{anga fakatoga}.

\(^{110}\) Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 1, 15 July 2012.


\(^{113}\) Morton, \textit{Becoming Tongan}, p. 23.
One of the central arguments of this thesis is that Tonga’s hierarchy is in a state of flux and contestation, and that members of each of the three strata—royals, nobles/chiefs and commoners—will continue to experience significant changes to their social position in society in the near future. This change will depend, firstly, on how each group chooses to approach the transition to democracy—change, much like the rapid conversion to Christianity in the early nineteenth century—that will have dramatic effects on Tongan society (discussed in depth later in the thesis), and second, how far they are willing to diverge from the traditional hierarchical system that has shaped Tongan society over many decades. Of course, both of these are intricately linked. An analysis of the ways this could potentially transpire will be discussed in later chapters, but as a foundation for that I must return to my central argument advanced in the introduction: Tonga is not governed by kingship but, instead, kinship. It is only through understanding Tongan kinship relations and the associated social hierarchy that one can then understand the place of Tongan kingship. To do this, I will critically analyse the complex social hierarchy in Tonga by considering the crucial importance of rank and status, and what is perceived as Tongan ‘custom’, or ‘tradition’ in the lives of every Tongan, from the humblest of commoners to the most elevated King.

Tonga has three distinct social ‘classes’; royalty, those who belong to the immediate family of a King or Queen; nobility, those who belong to the immediate family of a recognised estate-holding nōpele, or noble; and ‘commoners’, those who make up the vast majority of Tonga’s population, who are not of the royal or noble/chiefly classes.

114 The Tongan class system is discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

115 There are thirty-three nobles in Tonga. Thirty were appointed by King George Tupou I, two by King Taufa’ahau Tupou II, and one by Queen Sālote Tupou III (see Appendix C). The noble titles are associated with hereditary estates and are passed down by the law of primogeniture.
The Tongan word for commoners is *tu’a*, which means ‘outside’ or ‘behind’ and is the opposite to ‘inside’ and ‘front’ (of house, etc.).\(^{116}\) As Lee explains, *t’ua* also acts as a spatial metaphor when applied to social position – as well as being an accurate rendering of the actual spatial location of *t’ua* (in terms of rank or status) during many ceremonial events. For example, those who are *t’ua* will be found at the back of the house, often outdoors, preparing food for a feast, and remaining there to clean up while invited guests eat.\(^{117}\)

*Tu’a* is also about acknowledging your status relative to the superiority of the King, or members of his family. For example, everyone is *tu’a* to the King, including his wife and children. But then less senior royals, or nobles, may be *tu’a* to the Queen, or to the children of the King. Understanding whom you are above (that is, being ‘eiki over) in the Tongan social hierarchy, and to whom you are *t’ua*, is central to Tongan notions of identity and personhood.\(^{118}\)

Two of my Tongan interlocutors, ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu and Manutu’ufanga Naufahu both describe how the use of the word *tu’a* has become somewhat confused today.\(^{119}\) In the past, one was only *tu’a* to either the King or members of his family, but today they note that, especially in comments made on Facebook and related social media, some people incorrectly use the word *tu’a* to portray their inferiority to people within their own families, or village, based on age or another status pertaining within the family. A recent example I saw on Facebook was of a young woman who was sending greetings to her school principal (who was neither royal or noble), ending with ‘*Tu’a ‘ofa atu*’, meaning ‘with love from a person inferior to you’. According to both

\(^{116}\) Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 1, March 2015.

\(^{117}\) Morton, *Becoming Tongan*, p. 25.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.

\(^{119}\) Interviews with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 1, July 2012 and Manutuufanga Naufahu, March 2015.
Palu-Tatafu and Naufahu, the use of the word *tu’a* in this case is not correct because *tu’a* cannot be used to position yourself in relation to another commoner, no matter how senior their position is in relation to you. However, what is not clear is whether the use of the word *tu’a* in this way is because some people do not understand its traditional meaning, or whether it is a conscious innovation, being used more broadly to show one’s inferiority to a person or to humble oneself in relation to a person one wants to acknowledge as superior. One argument is that the meaning of the word *tu’a* has simply changed, but Palu-Tatafu proclaims, ‘Some people are misusing the word in this way because they don’t know any better’.  

**The ‘middle’ class and the rising class**

While the King and the royal family are clearly at the top of the Tongan social order, and commoners at the bottom, the middle group, the nobility/chiefs, traverses a range of subtle gradations, with some members of the nobility being closer to the royal family by blood or marriage, while others have larger estates that give them wealth—and with that, power—far superior to others. There is also a group of slightly less senior chiefs, and talking chiefs, or *matāpule*, who are not strictly nobles, but whose status is slightly higher than that of commoners.  

While I describe the nobility/chiefs as the ‘middle’ group of Tonga’s class system, it is not the Tongan equivalent of the middle class in a Marxist sense, as the nobility in Tonga is part of the ruling class, rather than between the ruling class and proletariat as the Marxist middle class or bourgeoisie is defined. The ‘middle’ rather describes the nobility as situated in between the royalty and commoners, the two other class groups whose membership is more clearly defined.

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120 Interview with Palu-Tatafu, no. 1, July 2012.

But there is also a novel phenomenon when considering a ‘middle class’ in Tonga, something that has developed since the 1960s, and that is the rise of educated and affluent commoners who seek to have influence according to their individual accomplishments irrespective of their lack of royal or noble blood.

When the commercial sector of the economy was thrown open to native Tongans after the Second World War, in part because of the emigration of most Europeans and part-Europeans who had controlled it, and when that sector expanded from the late 1960s on, the commoners, seasoned with toil, education, and skills training, were the ones equipped to move into that sector to establish themselves. Fortunes varied; many fell by the wayside, but some have succeeded to become wealthier than most of the aristocracy. With a few exceptions, the wealthiest and most economically powerful Tongans today are commoners. The same dominance obtains in the fields of education, the trades, and the professions.

These educated or wealthy commoners are, in many ways, challenging the hereditary class system, which only gives status to people who have high-ranking genealogy. Before the 1960s, it was almost exclusively members of royalty or nobility who were highly educated, usually abroad in Aotearoa New Zealand or Australia, and who likewise had a monopoly on the use of land and its resources in Tonga. But this has not been the case for a number of years and thus there are new questions about what the Tongan social hierarchy looks like, how it works, and how it might look in the future.

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122 Although some interlocutors argued that it was not until the 1980s when telecommunications became commonplace.


124 King Taufa‘ahau Tupou IV was the first Tongan to graduate from a university (Sydney) in 1942.
As one interlocutor told me, ‘Tonga may be slow to evolve compared to our neighbours, but we are definitely evolving and our society is changing day by day.’

Twenty years ago in an essay on the democratisation of Tonga, Epeli Hau‘ofa forecast this evolution when he argued that, ‘the ruling aristocratic section of the community [the nobility] has declined. On the other hand, the commoner section is gaining power’. Much like the ascent of the middle classes in the United Kingdom, many educated Tongans who have accumulated wealth and influence have brought about the existence of what may be considered a new ‘class’ within the Tongan hierarchy. This group is not in the ‘middle’ in the sense that the nobility is, but is more ‘middle’ in the Western sense. But short of having two different types of middle class—and Tonga’s nobility is very much entrenched in that position—I suggest a name for this new group could be the rising class, a fitting term that falls on a continuum that does not necessarily have an end point. We may note that recently Tonga had its first ever democratically elected government and commoner Prime Minister, something discussed in more detail in Chapter Six on Tongan democracy and change.

How the rising class is recognised in Tonga varies depending on whom you talk to, with one interlocutor I spoke to agreeing with the idea that this group is on the rise, ‘nothing will stop them until they are governing this country, and that is fair enough as commoners are the majority in Tonga’ (a fitting claim, made to me almost a year before the previous Tongan election, which, as discussed later in the thesis, resulted in the election of a commoner prime minister). There are also strong views among some that no amount of money or education can lift your social class or status.

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125 Interview with Lupepau’u Tuita, July 2012.

126 Hau'ofa, ‘Thy kingdom come’.

127 Interview with Seini (pseudonym), March 2014.
You know how pālangis have blood groups, like A, A+, and O. With Tongans, we have blood groups too. There is a royal blood group, a chiefly blood group, and a commoner blood group. With Tongans, no matter how much money you have or how educated you are, that does not change your blood group. And money does not elevate you because your blood group defines your social status.128

This interesting perspective by Mrs Naufahu was one that I encountered a number of times in discussions with Tongans in Tonga. The views of Tongans in the diaspora were more varied, as discussed in Chapter Six.

**Rank and status: Fixity and fluidity**

Theoretically, everybody is ranked with respect to one another; in practice, there often is more than one way of ranking people, and rank often compares with non-rank-based power differentials. As a result, anxiety about rank affects every situation, public and private, from state pageantry to family events.129

Rank and status in Tonga, and how one abides, or not, by the accepted customs and protocols, are fundamentally linked to the broader patterns of contemporary Tongan sociality. Much of what dictates Tonga’s hierarchy is based on knowing your genealogy and how your rank positions you in relation to other people, both within your family and outside it. This, Lee explains, determines your status because rank is a ‘fixed social category, and status, [a] contextual social position’.130 The distinction between the two is subtle, but important. ‘Rank is fixed at birth, and the most fundamental distinction made in the ranking system is that between ‘Eiki (chief) and T‘ua (commoner)’131 while

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128 Interview with Manutu‘ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.


131 Ibid.
'status is calculated in context and is relative: that is, in any given context, a person’s status is relative to that of whoever else is present.' In Tonga, both one’s rank and one’s status is palpably very important. As Elizabeth Wood-Ellem wrote:

‘Rank is everything,’ said Queen Sālote, but rank is sometimes absolute (personal or blood rank) and sometimes relative (kainga rank or rank by title). Personal or blood rank is based on the sum total of the rank of one’s ancestors, the most elevated rank being direct descent from the Tu’i Tonga, and even more from the Tu’i Tonga Fefine (eldest sister of the Tu’i Tonga) or Tamaha (daughter of the Tu’i Tonga Fefine).

Relative or kainga rank applies on ceremonial occasions, such as funerals, where relationships through a certain person (the corpse in the case of a funeral) determines whether one is ‘high’ (‘eiki) or ‘low’ (tu’a) on that occasion. A person whose absolute rank was high might not eat at a feast if she or he is ‘low’ on that occasion; for example, ‘low’ is descended from the grandfather while ‘high’ is descended from that grandfather’s sister. (Sisters always outrank brothers.)

To give an example, in 2009 at the funeral of Vaohoi Naufahu, who was one of the nine children of Vilai Tupou, son of King George Tupou II and half-brother to Queen Sālote, the Crown Princess (now Queen) Nanasiapau‘u, while a very highly ranked noble’s daughter and wife of the Crown Prince, was seated on the ground and dressed in clothes indicating her position of being liongi, that is an inferior position to the deceased person, her paternal aunt, mehekitanga (Vaohoi was Nanasiapau‘u’s father’s youngest sister). In that context, Crown Princess Nanasiapau‘u (see Figure 22) was acknowledging the fahu position of her aunt, even though she herself held a much

132 Ibid.

133 Hixon, Sālote, Queen of Paradise.

higher official rank which would usually see her seated in a position of prominence at any event in Tonga.

In order to understand what rank and status mean to Tongans, particularly in the islands but also in the diaspora in some contexts, one must learn a multiplicity of intricate and complex lessons about things such as the *fahu* system, the taboos between brothers and sisters, and the differences in the language spoken to the King, and to the nobility. All of these privileged dimensions of Tongan sociality, which I either observed in my fieldwork in Tonga, Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand, or which my interlocutors saw as crucial to raise with me during my research interviews, will be considered in this chapter.

![Figure 22. Crown Princess Nanasiopau'u seated on the ground at her aunt’s funeral](image)

Source. Manutu'ufanga Naufahu, Facebook. Used with permission

135 Explained in more detail later in this chapter.
The guiding force of *anga fakatonga*

*Anga fakatonga* refers to a particular way of doing things, and is a concept similar to *Fa’a Samoa*, or *Tikanga Māori*. Literally translated to mean ‘the Tongan way’, *anga fakatonga* was described to me as the guiding ideology for how to live a good life in accordance with Tongan traditions and customs. Helen Lee explains that

*anga fakatonga* can be used in any context, from statements of key Tongan values (such as ‘*ofa)* to a description of the Tongan way of peeling vegetables (away from the body, not toward it in the Western way).

Manutu’ufanga Naufahu says that to live a decent life in Tonga

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136 The correct, Samoan way to do things.

137 The Māori customary system of values and practices.

138 Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.

139 ‘*Ofa* being the Tongan word for love.

you should live according to the principles of *anga fakatonga*. Things like respect for your parents, respect for the King, respect for God, being humble, being hospitable and things like that.\textsuperscript{141}

To be Tongan, she argued, was more than just a question of who your ancestors were. To be Tongan, you need to behave as Tongans are expected to behave. “There are many customs, traditions, and protocols that need to be followed and you have to hold yourself in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{142} For a Tongan not to abide by *anga fakatonga* would be seen as disrespectful.

It’s sort of like when you hear Tony Abbott saying ‘that is very un-Australian’ but way worse. People in Australia sometimes can’t even explain what it means to be Australian, but we know what it means to be Tongan. If you don’t live your life according to the Tongan way, then you are in a sense disrespecting the King because he is the ultimate role model on these things. In a way he kind of epitomises or sets the benchmark of *anga fakatonga*, it goes from him down to every other Tongan.\textsuperscript{143}

In support of this view, Princess Pilolevu Tuita explains that her grandmother, Queen Sālote, who was considered by many Tongans as the guardian of Tongan traditions, once told her that she would learn all it means to be Tongan and to be a Tongan royal by following her lead. “*Sio mai kia au, fai ‘a e me’a ‘oku ou fai,*” she said, meaning “Watch me, do as I do.”\textsuperscript{144} The Tongan monarch was traditionally seen as teacher and role model for all Tongans on what it means to behave as a Tongan

\textsuperscript{141} Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{144} Pilolevu Tuita cited in Hixon, ‘Sālote, Queen of Paradise’, p. 163.
should behave, with Queen Sālote making a particularly active effort to train the chiefly children in their history, genealogy and customs.\textsuperscript{145}

Of course, abiding by complex protocols and customs in one’s daily life is by no means unique to Tongans. In my own upbringing in a Māori/Cook Island Māori family, I grew up knowing about certain things being tapu (sacred, inviolable or restricted), and other things being noa (pure, or free of sacredness or restriction), and there was never a shortage of rules about things such as who speaks first on the marae, what prayers are said in the evenings, when to cut hair, who can cut whose hair, who can gather seafood, when and where to sleep in the meeting house, and many more. There was, as described by an aunt of mine, always a god or ancestor who you honour by doing X, or offend by doing Y. And so in Tonga I was prepared to be sensitive and considerate in the way I conducted my research because I was very conscious that my knowledge of Tongan customs and what was tapu and what was not, was limited to things I had been told by friends or read about in books.

While I expected Tongan society to be much more hierarchical than the Aotearoa New Zealand and Australian societies I grew up in (I anticipated that there would be many restrictions when interacting with royalty, for example), I did not expect there to be so much protocol to navigate in everyday life. After my first research trip to Tonga I said to a Tongan friend who now lives in Aotearoa New Zealand, ‘You people must have some of the most complex social protocols and customs anywhere in the world today’, to which she replied, ‘Welcome to my world bro. Why do you think I love living here [Aotearoa New Zealand] so much? I don’t have to be on guard all the time here ha ha!’\textsuperscript{146} On the opposite end of the spectrum, ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu rather said she felt that her understanding of the Tongan way made her feel like she was truly

\textsuperscript{145} Interview with Princess Pilolevu Tuita, October 2013.

\textsuperscript{146} Person has asked not to be identified in this research.
Tongan, and that she would ‘almost be lost’\(^\text{147}\) without her understanding of the many protocols and customs that she grew up learning and is now entirely fluent in. Some of these I experienced while in Tonga, and I will share some stories to give a further insight along with my own observations and perceptions.

**At the market: A prized bracelet**

One of my hosts during my first research trip to Tonga was showing me around the weekend flea market located on the edge of Nuku'alofa. While there, she spotted a woman who had, apparently, taken a prized bracelet from her some months before. ‘How and why did she take your bracelet?’ I asked. ‘She just saw it and said “That’s a nice bracelet” and because she is higher ranking to me, I had to offer it to her. When I did that she just said “Thank you” and took it.’ After some clarification I understood that for my host not to offer the bracelet, when the woman who was senior in social rank to her had clearly indicated an interest in it, would have been disrespectful. It has been a long-standing Tongan convention that an item so desired should be offered to the senior person as a way to endear oneself to that person. Usually, I was told, higher-ranking women would not accept an item offered to them when clearly it is something that belongs to the person possessing it and something that person presumably likes very much. In this case, my host told me, ‘She was just being greedy. I don’t like her anyway. She’s known for it. And I feel like asking [a mutual friend who is a princess] when she next sees her to say “Oh, what a nice bracelet,” so then she has to offer it to the princess who will then give it back to me.’ I asked her what she thought of this rather one-sided arrangement:

It’s stupid. Most people in high-ranking families already have everything they need. To take from people lower down the food chain is not right. It should be the other way

\(^{147}\) Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 1, July 2012.
around. She should give me her bracelet ha ha ha! If I see her again I will say ‘Oh, what a lovely diamond ring you have,’ ba ha ha haaa! I bet she won’t hand it over to me! But yeah, some of these ‘rules’ are just the way it is.\textsuperscript{148}

**On the beach: Covering up**

On that same research trip, I was visiting the small island of Pangaimotu, just a short boat trip from Nuku‘alofa on the main island of Tongatapu. On arrival, I immediately wanted to go for a swim as it was a scorching hot day and the small beach there looked every bit like the tropical paradise so many people imagine when they think of the beauty of the islands in the Pacific. On scanning the beach I noticed that all the people swimming there were wearing t-shirts; women were wearing t-shirts and/or pāreu\textsuperscript{149} over their swimming outfits, and men were wearing t-shirts with their shorts. My first reaction was that perhaps it was a group of people from the Exclusive Brethren, a religious group I knew of in Aotearoa New Zealand known for its strict rules about how to dress appropriately when in public. I asked someone near me, who I was introduced to as a local guide, ‘Why do you think all those people are wearing t-shirts in the water?’ To which he replied saying something like, ‘Everyone has to cover up their body in public. It will offend people otherwise.’ When I pushed him to ask why it would be considered offensive, he simply reiterated that it was not right and that was the way things are in Tonga. ‘Some things we just do because that’s the way it’s always been,’ he added. I was fascinated by his claim knowing, through stories from my grandparents, that it was certainly not the case in the Cook Islands because the need to put on more layers of clothes was brought in by the Christian missionaries. Prior to the arrival of missionaries, Rarotongans wore very little clothing, especially in warmer

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{149} A wrap-around garment also known as a lava-lava or sarong.
climates. In Tonga, it was during the time of King George Tupou I where the law was changed to ensure locals covered up their skin and bodies while on the beach to demonstrate some sort of modesty. Karl Mila’s poem ‘A Tongan reflection on no Rangatiratanga’, referred to in Chapter Four, puts it well:

Even today
It is illegal for a Tongan
To walk shirtless
In public
The paranoia
Of King George the first
The genuine worry
That foreign ships
Would land
Take things into
Their own hands
Put down their flag
Take over.150

Understanding the fahu system

It was explained to me early in my research that I needed to understand the concept of fahu because of its central significance in the broader Tongan kinship system.151 Fahu is a uniquely Tongan concept that is practised in every Tongan family and household. As Auckland-based Tongan academic Semisi Taumoepeau described to me, ‘to honour one’s fahu is to honour one’s entire family’.152 Explaining the Tongan concept of fahu is difficult to do succinctly, not because there are different definitions of what it means, but because the fahu system works subtly differently in every Tongan family. This is not so much in the way it is understood, but in the way it is practised. In particular, there

150 Karl Mila, Poem read to attendees of the Tonga Research Association conference, 8–10 July 2013. Unpublished but copy given to me by conference organiser.

151 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.

152 Interview with Semisi Taumoepeau, no. 1, February 2013.
are increasingly contestations as to who is the right fahu in a given context. Angelika Tuku'aho explained it like this:

Tongans pay the highest tribute to one’s fahu and she is taboo to those whom she is fahu to. It doesn’t matter if your fahu is retarded, has been to prison, or is poor compared to you. It doesn’t matter if your fahu lives in a small fale Tonga (Tongan house) while you live in a big European house. It doesn’t matter how much drama you have with her, or whether you have a good relationship etc. She is still your fahu no matter all those things!153

Fahu refers to a superior person within one’s kāinga (extended family). Kerry James put it this way: ‘A sister and her children are fahu “above the law” or more properly “above the tapu” not to her brother but to her brother’s descendants.’154 Elizabeth Wood-Ellem explains fahu as ‘a person whose relationship to an individual is such that she/he may demand support and favours’.155 ‘That person is a family member who is usually descended from an eldest sister of a father or male ancestor (e.g. father’s father’s eldest sister’s child). Lupepau’u Tuita explains fahu as the eldest (usually) female child of a man’s eldest sister.

When the man dies, the fahu is revered through the gifting of mats, the clean and fine weave of her ta’ovala (waist mat), and where her seat is located, usually near the head of the deceased so everyone can see who she is. A fahu is the person that all people at the funeral officially pay homage to, as the representative of the whole family of the deceased.156

153 Interview with Angelika Tuku'aho, no. 1, July 2012.
155 Wood-Ellem, Queen Sālote of Tonga, p. 302.
156 Personal communication with Lupepau’u Tuita, January 2013.
Tonga is funny because it’s both a patrilineal and matrilineal society … what I’ve been told is that … the men will rule the land and government, and the women rule the family and the extended family. So the fahu is the eldest sister, or the sister of a male, and she pretty much is the matriarch of the family and rules over her brothers, and her brothers’ children, and their descendants and her descendants go likewise.157

While internal familial dynamics make it quite clear that a sister outranks her brother within the family, how this translates into broader Tongan sociality is not quite so straightforward. Tongan women cannot own or inherit land, as that is reserved for nobles, who can only be men.158 The only exception to this is when the monarch is a woman, as was the case with Queen Salote Tupou III, as the Constitution of Tonga stipulates that all land in Tonga belongs to the monarch and can only be leased to others.159 In the modern social-political context, there is one women member of Parliament, and even though the Prime Minister has the power to appoint two Cabinet ministers from outside the Parliament, there were women in his first Cabinet. These issues will be explored further in Chapter Six.

There can sometimes be a dispute as to who the fahu might appropriately be on any given occasion, but that is usually when there are multiple generations of potential fahu, where, for example, an immediate family has no sisters and there becomes a need to go further back in the family tree to, say, an aunt, or even grand-aunt to determine an appropriate person to act as fahu. The fahu system plays an important role in understanding the role of women within the social hierarchy in Tonga. Described by

157 Interview with Kat Lobendahn, December, 2014.

158 As stipulated in the Tongan Constitution of 1875.

one of my interlocutors as a key element of ‘internal family politics’, the *fahu* role within Tongan families

is clearly defined and has the same weight of taboos from the most common household to the most senior royal household. The main difference is usually the scale on which these roles are acknowledged and played out.

While there are sometimes disagreements about who the right person is to be *fahu* in a certain context, some people also fail to maintain the *fahu* system when, for example, a member of the nobility or royal family is also present at a family event. Princess Sinaitakala Tuku‘aho explained that the correct protocol at a funeral for example, would be for people to acknowledge the *fahu* of the deceased person first. Indeed, Queen Sālote famously once said, ‘*Kapau ko ho fahu ko ha pusi, omi leva e pusi*’, which means ‘if your *fahu* is a cat, get that cat’. This saying is often quoted today in the context of an event where there is some contestation about who should be *fahu*, a member of the immediate family, or a royal/noble who is present. Kat Lobeden explained:

A lot of people, at funerals and weddings, if they see some sort of nobility around, or someone chiefly there … they just totally pass over the *fahu* and they give the top tier of the cake, for example, and they do everything towards that *’eiki* (chief), rather than to the *fahu*. Queen Sālote’s quote was saying ‘No, no, no, no! It should always be *fahu* first, and then you can do a separate thing for the distinguished guest (or *’eiki*).’

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160 Personal communication with Lupepau‘u Tuita, January 2013.

161 Ibid.

162 As explained to me in conversation with Crown Princess Sinaitakala Tuku‘aho and Afu Ha’apai Aho, October 2014.

163 Interview with Kat Lobendahn, December 2014.
The fahu concept is a universal Tongan principle that transcends the different social classes. It is entirely possible that a member of the royal family could have a lower ranked member of the nobility as fahu over them, for example, if the member of the royal family’s father is a noble and his or her mother is royal. In this example, one’s father’s sister, one’s mehekitanga, could exercise a fahu role over her niece/nephew, even though in the broader social hierarchy her niece or nephew is more highly ranked than her. If one’s father had a number of sisters, then one would have a number of mehekitanga, but it would be the eldest of these who exercises the fahu role. Each mehekitanga has a superior status over their brother’s children, whether or not she is the fahu. So even though it is the fahu to whom one gives the most reverence, one must still acknowledge inferiority to each of one’s mehekitanga. This is encapsulated in the saying, ‘Uli’uli ‘a mehekitanga’, literally translated as ‘black but a mehekitanga’, meaning she may be lowly in sibling ranking (e.g. the youngest) but she is still a mehekitanga (father’s sister, therefore aunt to his children).164

A mehekitanga can be the fahu, but the fahu is not always the mehekitanga. Fahu is not exclusive to one person, even though we may prefer to say that we have only one fahu (especially when one wants to dispute a claim of fahu over one). But fahu can be your dad’s sister/s, their children (usually their eldest daughter), and their grandchildren. Fahu can also be your dad’s aunt (father’s sister) and her female descendants. Fahu can go back a few generations on the female line. The point is that your mehekitanga and fahu are both superior to you. Everyone has a mehekitanga and a fahu but they may not be the same person. That means you may honour two people at a ceremony, your fahu and your mehekitanga.

164 Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.
The fahu system is so ingrained in the family that it even applies if one person’s fahu is also in the presence of their own fahu at a particular event. This person (a fahu’s fahu) is called ‘eiki maama.

At the official first birthday of Prince Tāufa‘āhau Tuku‘aho (son of the Crown Prince Tupouto‘a ‘Ulukalala and Princess Sinaitakala), his mehekitanga, Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho, was present and was given the appropriate acknowledgement of her role as fahu of her nephew, the young prince. A layer of his birthday cake was presented to her, and a number of other koloa (gifts of pandanus mats, tapa cloth etc.) were laid before her as gifts from her nephew. However, because Princess Angelika’s own fahu was present, her mehekitanga Princess Pilolevu Tuita, after graciously accepting the gifts Princess Angelika stood up and presented her layer of cake to her own fahu and then asked her attendants to move the koloa that was laid before her to a position in front of Princess Pilolevu. In doing this, Princess Angelika was acknowledging her own fahu as superior to her, even though she was initially being acknowledged as the fahu to her nephew in this context. Princess Pilolevu, as the ‘eiki mamaa, graciously accepted the layer of cake and koloa, and the people in attendance were thereby reminded of the depth and subtlety of the fahu concept.¹⁶⁵

The fahu system continues within a marriage by a husband and wife acknowledging each other’s fahu appropriately. Angelika Tuku‘aho explained:

As a woman, once you marry into a family you have kavenga [responsibility] and fatongia [obligation] for your own family and to the one you have married into. Therefore you follow your husband and you are bound by that duty to honour the fahu of that family (that is the fahu of your husband and children), even though you have your own fahu from your own family. Keep in mind, you are also probably a fahu yourself. Even adopted children are brought up to honour and respect the fahu of the

¹⁶⁵ Story relayed to me by Crown Princess Sinaitakala Tuku‘aho, October 2014.
family who adopted them. There is no direct link between a fahu and sister-in-law because the role of the fahu applies to the brother’s children [rather than the brother’s wife], which can go down for up to two or three generations depending on the closeness of the relationship. The sister-in-law has her own fahu from her own family whom she herself will honour and respect because of her father. Hence the fahu system is always based on your paternal aunty not your in-laws.166

Traditionally, a strict respect for the fahu system was based on the fear people had for the consequences of not respecting their fahu. ‘People avoided, or treated with extreme caution, those who were ‘eiki or fahu to them because of the tapu that could be invoked by an infringement of respect towards the mana inherent in their persons.’167 Today, the fahu system is still very much an important part of Tongan social relations but people observe it less out of fear and more out of respect for their family and the importance of maintaining good family relations.168 However, while the fahu system is still in place, some argue that it is weakening with the growing number of Tongans living overseas, and that as more and more Tongans live away from Tonga they are starting to give less value to their obligations to the fahu system,169 something that will be further explored in Chapter Six.

Royal protocol
As I earlier observed it is not just in the presence of royalty where one has to abide by a number of strict protocols and customs, at least from the perspective of a non-Tongan. However, in the presence of royalty these protocols become more rigid and Tongans

166 Personal communication with Angelika Tuku’aho, no. 3, May 2014.
167 James, ‘Tongan rank revisited’.
168 Interview with Manutu'ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, December 2015.
169 Interview with Lupepau'u Tuita, July 2012.
give scrupulous attention to ensuring their status is clear and that they behave accordingly in relation to all the people around them, but especially in relation to members of the royal family.

For example one evening I was sitting at a popular café in Nuku‘alofa having a meal with a couple of members of the royal family and I noticed a good friend of mine, a Tongan whom I have known for many years and with whom I attended university, come into the café to join some visiting Australian Government officials at a nearby table. I could see that he could see me and I waved, he smiled back in acknowledgement and so I assumed he would come by and say hello at some stage, or perhaps once he was settled I could go over to his table and say hello to him. As it happens I became engrossed in conversation with my hosts and did not notice my friend slip out of the café. I got up to go to the rest room and looked around for him but could not see him. I sent him a text asking where he was, and he said that he had already gone home. He was sorry not to be able to come and say hello, but he thought it would be seen as him stepping above his rank by coming to talk with me while I was seated with members of the royal family. I replied, ‘I am sure they would understand that you are a friend of mine as they know we went to university together’. To which he replied, ‘Yes bro but others in the café might not know that and they will say, “who does he think he is talking to them?”’ When I next saw him, he clarified what I had assumed he was saying; it is one thing to conduct yourself a certain way and navigate through the complexities of the Tongan hierarchy and knowing one’s place, but it is also just as important to be seen to do so by others around you.

That made sense to me and it brought back a memory of the experience I had on my first visit to the Cook Islands (where my maternal grandfather comes from). This trip was preceded by a long conversation with him and my grandmother on the plane from Aotearoa to Rarotonga. They told me that everywhere I go, and in everything I
did, I needed to remember that it reflects on our family. The comment made by my Māori grandmother about her husband’s country was something along these lines, Raro is a small place where everyone will know your family and everyone will be watching. They won’t say anything if you do things the right way because that’s what you should do, but they will be sure to talk about when you do things the wrong way!170

In my friend’s case at the café in Tonga, I was able to get over my initial disappointment that I did not get to chat with him in person that night because he was simply trying to navigate his way through a range of social and cultural considerations. He was very conscious that his behaviour could reflect badly on him, and indeed his family, and it really had nothing to do with me, or our friendship. That was reassuring.

**To sit on the floor or not?**

In contrast, I offer an example of a situation in which I felt rather uncomfortable. This was after a function I attended with some friends, including some members of the royal family, where we stopped by a Chinese restaurant, Emerald Hotel, to get some food to eat. They decided we would return to their home to eat it and then I would be dropped back at the hotel where I was staying, which was just up the road. On arrival at their house, the food was taken by a house staff member to be put onto plates. One of my hosts was not feeling well and excused herself to go to bed, and the other went to the bathroom and asked another house staff member to make myself and another Tongan friend feel welcome. This Tongan friend sat on the floor next to a large sofa, and I asked what she was doing. ‘We have to sit on the floor here,’ she responded. I looked to the house staff member and asked if that was the case, and if so, would my host be sitting on the floor too? ‘No, only they [meaning my royal hosts] sit on the chairs, everyone else sits on the floor.’ In my head I was wondering how anyone could seriously ask their

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170 Conversation with my grandmother, Helen Te Ara o Rehua Metuamate, November 2000.
guest to sit on the floor while they sat on a comfy chair, especially when we would be eating supper. I said to the house staff member, ‘I am not sitting on the floor to eat my supper while [my host] sits on the chair. If that is what is expected then I would prefer to go back to my hotel and eat alone.’ The house staff member, somewhat startled, was quick to find another alternative. ‘Ok, let’s eat together in the kitchen.’ So we went to the kitchen and sat at a table, while the house staff member sat himself on the floor, until our host returned and, seemingly happy to be seated anywhere, joined us at the table. We ate our supper and enjoyed our time together with nothing further spoken on the matter. The house staff member, whom I spoke with afterwards, appeared to be confused about what rules applied to me as a non-Tongan guest in the house as he was not used to seeing a non-Tongan guest in an informal context like this. If I was Tongan, he said, it would have been much more straightforward and I would instinctively have known to sit on the floor.

**The influence of *anga fakapālangi***

While *anga fakatonga* is the Tongan way, *anga fakapālangi* is the *pālangi*, or European/Western way. *Pālangi*, short for *papālangi*, is a word that, today, refers to non-Tongan people usually of Caucasian appearance. Its traditional use and etymology is contested but the word itself predates Captain James Cook, whose writings record its use in a number of contexts.\(^{171}\) According to Serge Tcherkézoff it was likely first used by Polynesians ‘at least when they saw Tasman in 1643 and maybe at the arrival of LeMaire’s expedition in 1616’.\(^{172}\) Today *pālangi* is a word widely used and understood across Tonga, Samoa and Aotearoa as referring to non-Indigenous and non-Pacific, Western people and their ways of being, doing and knowing.

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\(^{172}\) Ibid.
Anga fakapālangi is distinctly different to anga fakatonga, although they are not opposites and can operate in complementary ways in some contexts. Eating with a knife and fork, for example, a practice widely used in Tonga today, is anga fakapālangi. Similarly, sitting on chairs at a community gathering is anga fakapālangi. But these are relatively minor practices that are now widely adopted by Tongans both in the islands and the diaspora. But not everything that is anga fakapālangi is so easily accepted. For example, while the television is a commonplace item in many Tongan homes, and many pālangi shows are popular with Tongans, it is not appropriate for a brother and sister to be alone in a room watching the television.173 In line with anga fakatonga, the tapu between a brother and sister restricts any slightly intimate behaviour, even of this nature, between siblings of the opposite sex. James explains that ‘avoidance was one of the most potent tapu in Tonga’,174 and this applied across many relationships, for example in the way a person behaved towards their fahu, a tu’a in relation to an ‘eiki, and a brother towards his sister. This ‘avoidance’ tapu applies at every level of Tongan society, but for brothers and sisters it is especially strict when they are children and young adults. Princess Pilolevu spoke of her childhood with her brother, King George Tupou V:

There is a certain tapu about how we could interact. For example, as children, we were forbidden to play together, so it was hard to be close at those ages. We became closer as adults.175

Some Tongans, especially those in the diaspora based in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, adopt Western practices that may seem foreign to the average Tongan in Tonga. For example, on attending a Tongan church service in Sydney, I noticed many

173 Interview with Fakailoatonga Taumoefolau, no. 1, July 2012.
174 James, ‘Tongan rank revisited’, p. 98.
175 Interview with Princess Pilolevu Tuita, October 2013.
people wearing suits or dresses without the traditional Tongan taʻovala, whereas on all occasions I went to church services in Tonga I was the only person not wearing a taʻovala. To many Tongans, wearing taʻovala is the most explicit way of showing you are Tongan, and to not wear taʻovala at a Tongan event such as a church service or funeral, is seen asanga fakapālangi. One interlocutor said quite clearly to me that while she realises that it is inevitable that pālangi ways will spread amongst Tongan people, she would never attend a Tongan event without wearing her taʻovala because she would not want to be seen as doing thingsanga fakapālangi, something she considered to be at odds withanga fakatonga.176

**Recognising tuʻa status relative to royalty**

The reverence paid to members of the Tongan Royal family by commoners and nobles is something quite unique today. While bowing is a common practice in Japan, in Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand society today you almost never see people bow in the presence of anyone ‘important’. Likewise it would be a strange sight to attend an event at, say, the Federal Parliament in Canberra and see the Governor General’s attendants seated on the floor while he and his wife eat their meal on seats at a table. That, however, would not be uncommon in Tonga. To lower yourself in the presence of the King, and senior members of his family, is not just a courtesy, it is expected.177 But there are many ways to show your inferiority to royalty in Tonga. For example, one night at a bar I observed members of the royal family enjoying themselves socially and while they were standing and seated at a table near the bar I noticed people walking past and bowing slightly in acknowledgement of them. In some cases people who appeared more familiar to the royals would approach them and embrace them slightly and the

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176 Interview with Manutuʻufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.

177 Interview with ’Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 1, July 2012.
royal would kiss them on the head. One example that I remember very clearly was when a man who was clearly quite inebriated walked towards the table where some royals sat and started to bow. As he was bowing I could see he was losing his balance and, quite quickly, his bow ended up being a direct head butt of the table before he fell to the ground. Most people laughed but the royals appeared to be not at all affected by this, although one person who quickly ushered the man away uttered words to the effect of ‘you are an embarrassment, go home!’

Another example of this subtle acknowledgement of royalty that comes to mind is from a wedding I attended of a female friend who is a member of the royal family to a man whose family was wealthy but were nevertheless still commoners. At the wedding ceremony in a church in Parnell, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, the family and friends of the bride sat to the right-hand side of the church aisle, while the family and friends of the groom sat to the left. In the front row of seats on the right, the bride’s parents sat in the seats immediately next to the aisle, whereas on the left the groom’s mother left two spaces empty and sat in the third seat from the aisle, apparently as a sign of her tu’a to the (royal) family of her soon-to-be daughter-in-law. Further to that, at the wedding reception, a grand affair with five hundred guests and a two-tier ‘high table’ (the first row of tables for the prime minister and nobles, and the second (higher) table for the Queen Mother and members of the royal family). Naturally, the bride’s parents and family members were seated on the highest table, but the groom’s family was not seated on either. Indeed, the mother of the groom was seated next to me on a table directly in front of the high tables (but on the main floor of the grand reception hall). It seemed quite strange to me to be seated next to the groom’s mother, whom I did not know and had never met before, at her own son’s wedding. I wanted to ask her whether I had made a mistake and had been seated at the wrong table—or, indeed, whether she had—but so as not to embarrass her, I texted a friend who was present and
knew both families well, ‘Why is the groom’s mother seated at this table with us and not in a place of prominence?’ To which my friend replied,

Why would she be? Her son has just married a member of the royal family. You couldn’t possibly ask for more prominence than that. She would be totally embarrassed if she was invited to sit at the high table. And she would be judged for doing so. She is in the right place where she is.\(^{178}\)

Since that occasion, I have come to understand that those commoner Tongans who are close to the royal family will actively go out of their way to ensure that people can see a distinction between them and their royal relatives, friends and in-laws. Not only is this seen as the respectful thing to do by Tongans, it is also a way to ensure they cannot be accused of \textit{fie’eiki}, trying to be an ‘\textit{eiki},\(^{179}\) which, in a society that is very much influenced by status and rank, is an accusation that no Tongan wants to have aimed at them. It would heavily impact on their reputation and that of their family.

**Mana: A not so commonly used word**

The concept of \textit{mana} in Tonga is similar to that in Aotearoa. \textit{Mana} is an energy or divine power that is possessed by a person who behaves in a way or displays qualities that other people respect, admire, or fear. One observation I made from my fieldwork in Tonga was that the word \textit{mana} is not really used by Tongans in their general day-to-day conversations. In fact, in preparation for a presentation I was giving at the \textit{New Mana Symposium},\(^{180}\) I found that in all of my interview transcripts and field notes over almost

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\(^{178}\) Personal communication with a friend I have chosen not to name in light of the frankness of the comments.

\(^{179}\) ‘\textit{Eiki} being someone of chiefly or royal status.

\(^{180}\) Hosted by Matt Tomlinson and Ty Kawika Tengan at The Australian National University in 2013. Several papers delivered there are published in the collection \textit{New Mana}. See Matt Tomlinson and Ty Kawika Tengan (eds), \textit{New Mana: Transformations of a Classic Concept in Pacific Languages and Cultures}, Canberra: ANU Press, 2016. DOI: \texttt{10.22459/NM.04.2016}. 
eighteen months, the word *mana* was not recorded once. This seemed unusual to me coming from a cultural background where *mana* was regularly spoken of not just in formal contexts on the *marae*, or in Māori liturgical texts,\(^{181}\) but in everyday life. When talking of the qualities of a person, for example it would not be uncommon to hear someone say something like ‘Anaru is a very good father. He really is a role model for his children and the broader family. He has strong *mana*.’ James had a similar finding in her research about the use of the word *mana* in Tonga: ‘The word *mana* is hardly used in current Tongan discourse. Even in liturgy, terms such as *langilangi* will be used rather than *mana* to describe the “glory of God”’.\(^{182}\) With this in mind I decided to ask a few of my interlocutors about their understanding of *mana* in the Tongan context.

Perhaps one of the reasons the word *mana* is not used so commonly in Tonga is that some people believe it is a word that does not apply to commoners. One interlocutor said to me that *mana* was usually only associated with the King,\(^{183}\) while another suggested that traditionally people believed that *mana* was something only chiefs possessed.\(^{184}\) Others suggested that every Tongan is able to possess *mana*.\(^{185}\) James observes that ‘*mana* was believed to be intrinsic to persons of high birth’,\(^{186}\) but *pule*, political power or might, was something that could be achieved by anyone who, for example, became a victorious warrior.\(^{187}\) In conversation with me about the concept of *mana* in Tonga, Frederica Tuita (now Frederica Filipe) said she believed that ‘living

\(^{181}\) Such as *The Catholic Māori Missal* and the *Catholic Māori Mass and Hymn Book*.

\(^{182}\) James, ‘Tongan rank revisited’, p. 98.

\(^{183}\) Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.

\(^{184}\) Personal communication with Frederica Filipe, 13 September 2013.

\(^{185}\) Interview with Fakailoatonga Taumoefolau, no. 1, July 2012.

\(^{186}\) James, ‘Tongan rank revisited’.

\(^{187}\) Ibid.
one’s life according to the golden pillars of Tongan society is one clear way to earn
*mana*.\(^\text{188}\) She also said that there are different levels of *mana* depending on who you
are and how you conduct yourself, with the King being the person who possesses the
most *mana*.\(^\text{189}\)

The best way I believe *mana* would be demonstrated in a Tongan context would
be during cultural events where the King is present, such as a traditional Tongan Kava
ceremony for the bestowment of chiefly or noble’s titles (*pongipongi*). The Kava circle
includes all Tongan chiefs, nobles and *matāpule* (talking chiefs) both high and lower
ranking. It is a grand occasion but is incomplete without the King (*‘Olovaha*). The
King’s presence makes the Kava circle *tapu*, or sacred, and I believe that is because of
his *mana*. Should anyone else take his place, it is a great honour but does not have the
same effect as when the King is there. This is because only he possesses a certain
*mana*.\(^\text{190}\)

**Language**

The royal language was used exclusively for the Queen and God … In the Queen’s
presence, even a very high-ranking chief would refer to himself derogatively as her
‘male slave’ or ‘a miserable floating coconut shell’, for example.\(^\text{191}\)

As with many languages, there are different levels or orders of the Tongan language that
indicate a person’s social status. They are not distinct languages as such, but rather
more three variations of the base language with different expressions and words used
depending on to whom one is speaking. The first is the royal language, which is spoken
to the monarch; the chiefly language, spoken to royals, other than the monarch, and the

\(^\text{188}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{189}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{190}\) Personal communication with Frederica Filipe, 13 September 2013.

\(^\text{191}\) Wood-Ellem, *Queen Sālote of Tonga*, p. 64.
nobility; and the inferior language, spoken to commoners. For example, *Mālo e lakoifie* is reserved for greeting the King, *Mālo a laumalie* is hello to nobles and royals (other than the King), and *Mālo e lelei* is hello to commoners. As Kaeppler explains:

Highly developed in Tongan is a language of respect, in which words reflect societal ranking. Thus for the same meanings, when speaking to the king one uses different words from those used when speaking to chiefs, and still other words are used in speaking to commoners. Thus ‘go’ is ha’ele when referring to the King, me’a to chiefs, ‘alu to commoners, and lele, the ordinary word for ‘run,’ is used when speaking of oneself to persons of higher rank. Integrally related to the language of respect is speechmaking.\(^{192}\)

Interestingly, while the language does give away the rank of the person speaking it, and the person being spoken to, it is not gender specific.\(^{193}\) So, for example, if you could overhear someone speaking around the corner to someone you could quickly work out if a person was speaking with a noble based on the words they used, but you could not tell if it was a noble woman or noble man.

**The golden pillars of Tongan society**

In concluding this chapter, I focus on what a number of interlocutors highlighted were an important set of values that underlie Tonga’s social relations today. These values are the *kavei koula*, or golden values (pillars), of Tongan society. In 1964 during a speech at the opening of the Tonga Cultural and Heritage Society, Queen Sālote emphasised four values that underpin the reciprocal relationship between the nobility and the people of the *fonua*. These four *Pou* (pillars) are: i. *Faka'apa'apa* (acknowledging and returning respect) ii. *Anga fakatokilalo/loto tō* (humility, open to

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\(^{192}\) Kaeppler, ‘Rank in Tonga’.

\(^{193}\) Ibid.
learning) iii. *Tauhi vaha’a/vā* (keeping the relationship ongoing, alive and well) iv.

*Mamahi ‘i me’a* (loyalty and passion in application of self). *‘Ofa* (love and care, kindness) is the foundation/ground on which the *Pou* stand.\(^{194}\)

While traditionally it may have been for fear of the consequences of breaking *tapu* that one behaved a certain way, today the many protocols and customs that are in place in Tonga, and the way one interacts with others above or below one, are interlinked with the *kavei koula.*

All the elements discussed in this chapter come from earlier hierarchical structures in Tonga that have long since been transformed and developed. But these old structures and ideas have, as James wrote:

> in large part due to the fact that many of the practices have become enshrined as Tongan ‘customs’ … taken on a new proud meaning for Tongans in a world where they seek to maintain their unique identity amongst people from many nations.\(^{195}\)

The *fahu* system, the *tapu* between a brother and a sister, the relationship between *tu’a* and *‘eiki,* and the language used to address different class groups—all of these have become important facets of the life of a Tongan and so to adhere to their principles is to be, and to be seen to be, behaving as a Tongan should.

Many people I interviewed referred without prompting to the *kavei koula* as a guiding philosophy by which they live their lives. It became clear that these principles apply from the bottom of Tongan society to the very top. The *kavei koula,* in a sense, has given a modern inflection to some ancient practices, which has meant they are very much alive today. The *kavei koula* were initially four key principles developed by Queen Sālote but these have grown in number to five. To elaborate:


\(^{195}\) James, ‘Tongan rank revisited’.
The first is *Faka‘apa‘apa* – mutual respect, which is acknowledging and returning respect (we show respect with how we dress, the language we use in public and our actions). The second is *Lototō* – humility and generosity, which is being open to learning and acknowledging mistakes, (show your humbleness with your attitude). The third is *Tauhi Vaha‘a* – keeping good relations alive and well and performing duties and sharing work (by helping out when there is a family funeral or wedding). Fourth is *Mamahi‘i Me‘a* – loyalty, commitment, passion (by contending and striving for the best when you play sport or perform duties). And fifth, *Feveitokai‘aki* – honour (by giving credit or prestige or obeisance to those who helped you get through school and on prize giving day, giving them your *pale* (prize), just like at *fakapale* you might want to give it to someone else, such as your *fahu*). And the foundation on which the pillars are all built is *‘ofa* – love.¹⁹⁶

Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho’s explanation of the *kavei koula* emphasised that these are essentially the core values that underlie the Tongan kinship system today.¹⁹⁷ To understand the kinship system, and therefore the kingship system, one must understand the meaning and significance of these values. The next chapter will look at how some of these values are represented in symbols of the king and kingship in Tonga.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Angelika Tuku‘aho, no. 3, May 2014.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
Chapter Four

The Tongan King as Symbol

In setting the scene for an examination of the Tongan King as symbol, I refer again to Stacy Kamehiro who states that symbols, including writings and art work, are cultural documents that matter deeply, because

a society is what it remembers, and history is a practice of memory and remembering. Histories are certain objectifications of certain memories that inform the present and shape the future; they involve, like some Polynesian conceptions of time, a backing into the future, a facing toward the past that is conditioned by the present to chart the future.198

In the Tongan language the word *mu’a* means both ‘onward’ or ‘in front of’, and also ‘the past’ or ‘before’. This interesting concept, of backing forward, of using the past to direct the future, is common amongst Oceanic peoples and is how kingship touches the lives of all Tongans, even those who are unable to get close to the King in person. The history of Tongan kingship, which encompasses the lives and reign of several individual kings, is more than just a history of the past. The kingship of Tonga provides markers for the future, a roadmap from the past that provides direction for modern Tonga, as well as modern Tongans, wherever they live throughout the diaspora. Symbols of Tongan kingship are of key importance—as this is how Tongans remember their history, while shaping their future. This concept, the King being both a symbol of the past but a direction for the future, was articulated in one of the many conversations I had about King George Tupou V with a Tongan woman in her thirties:

Outsiders saw him as a little bit ‘odd’, but I was proud of him and his colorfulness. So he loved fancy clothes and spoke French and German? What King or Queen doesn’t speak more than one language and wear the best clothes? Some want him to walk around wearing coconut sandals and a ta’ovala. Why? It’s the twenty-first century man! Why can’t the King of Tonga be modern too?199

In an interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, I was challenged:

I don’t know what the Queen of New Zealand represents to you Areti, but surely you don’t see her as representative of New Zealand, as a symbol of who you are?200

This comment made very early in my research has always sat uneasily with me. Not because it was a difficult question to answer, or because I did not know the answer. I felt, and indeed still do feel, somewhat uneasy because the answer to this question brings forth a whole series of uncomfortable truths about my country, its relationship with the British Crown, and the impact of colonisation on my people. The Queen of New Zealand, who is also the Queen of England and numerous other colonial nations, is not someone I choose to identify with. If I looked on the surface of my life, I could argue she has very little to do with my people and who I am. I do not have any family ties to her, she has never visited my marae (tribal meeting place) or my family home town, and she does not speak the Māori language.

But if I dig slightly deeper I realise that it is perhaps wishful thinking on my part to view my relationship with the Queen of New Zealand as so distant, and to not see her as connected to what it means to be a New Zealander today. Whether or not I like or agree with it, Queen Elizabeth II is the constitutional head of state of New Zealand. Representatives of her, or her ancestors, presided over significant events that shaped our history, the Treaty of Waitangi being the most prominent example to come to mind.

199 Interview with ‘Ana, December 2012.

200 Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, July 2012.
Queen Elizabeth II’s royal honours system has given knightly titles to two of my uncles, and my Dad served both her and our country in his thirty or so years in the New Zealand Army. While I was researching national anthems in order to contextualise the Tongan national anthem discussed in this chapter, I also found that Aotearoa New Zealand has two official national anthems, the well-known ‘God Defend New Zealand’, and the even more widely known ‘God Save the Queen’, although I doubt many people realised the latter was also that of Aotearoa New Zealand. So the question about whether the Queen of New Zealand is a symbol of who I am strikes a nerve because the answer is neither simple nor comfortable for me, although importantly it did help me to think more deeply about my relationship with ‘my’ monarch which, in turn, helped me to also think of ways to explore the Tongan people’s relationship with theirs. In my case, I have no kinship with Queen Elizabeth II, and presumably most pakeha New Zealanders do not either. The kinship connection Tongans have to their King is a crucial difference.

There are different elements to the symbolism of the Tongan King. Some are advanced and embraced by the people, and others are not fully understood. At many levels it is apparent that the Tongan King does symbolise what it means to be Tongan, but there are also ways in which the people do not relate to him. This chapter seeks to explore what the King symbolises and what this means, both to Tongans and also to those looking from a distance, to foreign observers. It acknowledges that Tonga’s kingship represents the past, present and future concurrently. The symbolism of the King is discussed, observed, researched and represented in many ways, including through modern and historical Tongan artwork. I will explore the kingship of Tonga as seen in the media in the lives of modern Tongans, and as seen in artwork (poetry, photography, drawing, craft, song and film) produced by contemporary Tongan artists. Through these symbols, the way the history and past of Tonga’s monarchy directs the present and the future will be examined.
The Song of the King

‘E ‘otua māfimafi
ko homau ‘eiki koe
ko koe ko e falala‘anga
mo e ‘ofa ki Tonga;
‘Afio hifo ‘emau lotu
‘aia ‘oku mau fai ni
mo ke tali homau loto
‘o malu’i ‘a Tupou.

Oh, almighty God!
You are our Lord,
It is You, the pillar
And the love to Tonga.
Look down on our prayer
That is what we do now
And may You answer our wish
To protect Tupou.

Oh almighty God above
Thou art our lord and sure defense
As your people, we trust thee
And our Tonga thou dost love
Hear our prayer for thou unseen
We know that thou hast blessed our land
Grant our earnest supplication
God save Tupou, our King. 201

In the Pacific context, the Tongan national anthem is not unique in its strong reverence for and reference to God. During the 21st Ship for World Youth program, when I was a delegate for Aotearoa New Zealand, the national anthems of participating countries were played each day at the morning assembly. Other nations represented on

201 Initially accessed from the Tongan Government’s Legislation website. Online: legislation.to/Tonga/DATA/PRIN/1988-060/NationalAnthemofTongaAct.pdf (12 January 2017). The information has since been removed but I have sought advice from the Tongan Palace Office that this information and translation are correct and appropriate to use in this thesis.
the 21st Ship for World Youth included Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu amongst others. I became familiar with the lyrics and music for each of the national anthems and noticed what the commonalities were, and what was different. The most obvious commonality was that the anthems each called on God for blessings and guidance. Fiji’s national anthem is called ‘God Bless Fiji’ and New Zealand’s more commonly used one is ‘God Defend New Zealand’. Tonga’s anthem begins with ‘‘E ‘Otua mafimafi’ (Oh, almighty God) while Vanuatu’s anthem has the Bislama words ‘God i givim ples ia long yumi’ (God has given us this land).202 Invoking God’s name in these anthems is common not just because of the widespread presence of Christianity in the Pacific, as discussed in Chapter Three, but also because it is common in many Pacific cultures to sing and dance about the world’s creation and creator/s. What is unique about Tonga’s national anthem, in the Pacific context, is the prominence given to the King both in the final lyrics which name the first Tupou, and in the title of the anthem ‘Ko e fasi ‘o e tu’i ‘o e ‘Otua Tonga’, meaning the song of the King of the islands of Tonga. None of the other anthems mentioned above (Fiji, Vanuatu, or Aotearoa New Zealand) mention a leader other than God, and a quick internet search for the lyrics of the national anthems of Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea showed the same. None of their anthems mention a paramount chief or head of state.

But Tonga is by no means unique in the world when it comes to referencing the monarch in their anthem. In monarchies such as Bhutan, the lyrics ‘He is the King of Bhutan, the precious sovereign. May His being remain unchanging, and the Kingdom prosper’ demonstrate the significance of their King. In Malaysia they sing for their ruler, ‘May our Ruler have a successful reign’. Brunei calls on God to bless their King, ‘God bless His Majesty with a long life. Justly and robly rule the Kingdom’, while

Saudi Arabia sings ‘Long live the King for the flag and the homeland!’ And, of course the opening words to the British national anthem are ‘God save our gracious Queen, long live our noble Queen’. These anthems show the significant place the monarch has in articulation of these diverse national identities as well as the crucial role of Christianity in legitimating the monarchy.

Different representations of the King

It’s not so much who he is but what he represents. The King has mana and that is a hard thing to interpret or explain to a non-Tongan. Even in our songs and our art we have different ways of portraying the King. Sometimes he is as a man, sometimes he is a King, sometimes he is a descendant of God.203

You might say Tongans are not very humble people. We say that the King is a direct descendant of God.204

In Tonga’s highly stratified society, as we have seen genealogy is of paramount importance. Most titles are hereditary, and objects passed down as heirlooms create common connections. For those Tongans who are not born into positions that will see them physically or genealogically close to the King, artwork and symbols of the King, and Tonga’s kingship, are of deep importance, while also allowing outsiders to gain some understanding of the Tongan monarchy.

Kamehiro writes on the arts of kingship in Hawai‘i, observing that art itself can embody mana, and make it active in the world.205 The next part of this chapter looks at several artworks produced by Tongan people today, who are representative of the

203 Interview with Lady Eseta Fusitu’a, July 2012.

204 Interview with King Tupou VI, July 2012.

205 Kamehiro, The Arts of Kingship.
Tongan interlocutors I have spoken with in my research. A number of the Tongan artists I look at in this chapter live away from Tonga, and have mixed ancestry. All, however, have chosen to reflect on the King, on Tonga, and on their identities as Tongan people living in the modern world and the ever-expanding Tonga of today. The Tongan language does not have a word for the English term ‘ritual’ as the events that one might describe as ritual (such as church ceremonies, weddings, or funerals) are simply part of day-to-day life for Tongans. There are many events which could be described as ritual, and one of these, the drinking of kava, has been explored by Adrienne Kaeppler as the basis for many movements seen in Tongan dance.

An analysis of structured movements used in these important ceremonies led me to a larger exploration of kava ceremony in a contemporary perspective and its association with dance, especially as many Tongan dance movements reproduce those of kava mixing. Although kava ceremonies have been part of the anthropological literature for decades, the movements have been seldom mentioned … Performers are usually men who sit in a specified layout in a sacred performing space, and are served in a specific order.206

Kava drinking is a social activity in Tonga; as it is in many parts of Oceania. However, elements of a kava ceremony associated with the King (the kava ceremony attended by the king is called a taumafa kava) emphasise his important role as head of the kinship system in Tonga. The taumafa kava ceremony is an example of an ancient practice that is being performed in a similar way today as it was over 250 years ago. But, there are many parts of Tongan culture where the ‘art’ has evolved. For example, the evolving nature of koloa (gifting of Tongan mats and other handmade treasures) is linked to the changes occurring as Tonga expands in the diaspora, including the move

from *koloa* being for only high-ranking women to today, being created and exchanged by Tongan women of all ranks. Ping-Ann Addo has written on how the materials and designs of Tongan woven arts are being constantly transformed, as traditional barks are replaced by modern materials including synthetics.\(^{207}\) Frances Reardon Finney speaks about the use of motifs that outline royal genealogies being combined with symbols of life in the diaspora and more specifically, Australia, through motifs including the Sydney Harbour Bridge and kangaroos.\(^{208}\) These elements of Tongan culture, while evolving, still play an important part in portraying what the King symbolises.

**Modern symbols of kingship**

In a *New Zealand Herald* article titled ‘The madness of King George of Tonga’, written shortly after he became King, it was claimed by Jane Phare that Tupou V was renowned in Tonga as much for his distance from commoners as his eccentricities and odd behaviour … While the Western world poked fun at the [then] Crown Prince for wearing a monocle, dressing in pith helmets and speaking with a British plum the size of a coconut in his mouth, the Tongan people viewed him with the suspicion they would an alien arriving from space.\(^{209}\)

He was known to accept close family and friends calling him KGV or G5, other older friends from his school days continued to call him Taufa (short for Tāufa‘āhau) and otherwise Sir, Sire, Your Majesty, or ‘Afio. Tupou V did not have a normal


\(^{208}\) Frances Reardon Finney, “‘I thought it would be heaven’: Migration, gender, and community amongst overseas Tongans’, Masters in Anthropology thesis. The Australian National University, 1999.

upbringing by any standards. Princess Pilolevu Tuita said that as young children they were not expected to do chores,

We actually didn’t even know what chores were growing up. We thought everybody had servants. My brother and I did not play together as children because it was forbidden for brothers and sisters – taboo. He had his own playmates who were especially chosen to come to the Palace and play with him.\textsuperscript{210}

Two of Tupou V’s close ‘private friends’, Angus and Jenny Rogers from Auckland, describe him as someone with a real sense of humour who was ‘always looking for a wry joke’. They described Tupou V as a worldly man but someone who had a strong and deep love for Tonga.\textsuperscript{211}

At one level I laugh because it is amazing how many people got him wrong. People who assumed he was out of touch with Tongan things because he loved so many British things. But he was very Tongan and few people could match his understanding of Tongan ways.\textsuperscript{212}

Essentially, Lupepau’u outlined, ‘he was able to be Tongan and a global person’, something many people I interviewed felt was important for Tonga’s king to be in this modern age.

Although Tupou V had a very high profile, which was enabled by his granting access to the media to events, sitting for photos, and also the occasional television interview both as Crown Prince and as King, Jenny Rogers said he was clear that it was important for Tonga that people noticed it so that it would always be on the map. ‘Taufa was very savvy and he understood that Tonga’s future was reliant on people visiting it,

\textsuperscript{210} Interview with Princess Pilolevu Tuita, October 2013.

\textsuperscript{211} Interview with Angus Rogers, February 2013.

\textsuperscript{212} Interview with Lupepau’u Tuita, July 2012.
people willing to invest in it, and valuing it’. Rogers explained that Tupou V used his profile for Tonga’s benefit and that as a rather shy person he never felt comfortable being in the media and only did so when he felt he could advance Tonga’s interests.

Figure 24. ‘The King has chosen an old London taxi from the 1950s as his official state coach’


Tupou V’s image was seen as anything but dull and it is debatable as to whether his colourful character was more positive or negative for Tonga. But it appears to me that many of his decisions were criticised or mocked for no obvious reason. For example, much has been said and written about the ‘odd’ choice of car that King George Tupou V was driven around in in Tonga, but to those who knew him this was not unusual at all. In fact, this London cab pictured above is just one of many cars he (a car enthusiast) had including two London cabs—this one and an older one. Tupou V’s eldest niece, Lupepau‘u, told me that the King did not care much for what people wrote about him and sometimes he was amused by the interest people had in his choice of clothes or

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213 Interview with Jenny Rogers, February 2013.
Another niece of Tupou V, and younger sister of Lupepauʻu, Frederica also speaks of the King from the perspective of someone who knew him personally.

When I think of the late King George Tupou V, he wasn’t just a leader for the nation, but a leader for our family. I’ve always believed that anything was possible depending on the way one chooses to pursue it. And that is what I saw in the late King. Others before him pursued change for the Kingdom, but weren’t as successful. He initiated a step-by-step reform of the laws and legislations of Tonga, which lead Tonga to a more democratic government. Change wasn’t always something we welcomed with open arms [in Tonga]. After a few thousand years of living basically the same way, there isn’t much shock as to why. However, the late King took us with him down a road of uncertainty. I know I turned out all the better for it. His love for his people was like a light that led and taught us not to fear change but to embrace … the new frontier of democracy.\textsuperscript{215}

The life and death of a symbol

King George Tupou V was seen by many (particularly in the way he was portrayed in the news media) as an outgoing, colourful and interesting figure. His short reign was perhaps the most dramatic since 1875, when Tonga’s monarchy was established. Before the Tupou dynasty in 1875, there had been a long line of traditional Tongan chiefs known as the Tuʻi Kanokupolu, Tupou V was the 23\textsuperscript{rd} Tuʻi Kanokupolu\textsuperscript{216}. Referred to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[214] Interview with Lupepauʻu Tuita, July 2012.
\item[215] THEWHATITDO, ‘A Princess diary: In remembrance of HM King George Tupou V’.
\end{footnotes}
by western media as ‘eccentric’\textsuperscript{217} and even ‘out of touch’;\textsuperscript{218} the often misunderstood Tupou V was on the whole, considered by Tongans to be highly educated and sophisticated, speaking several languages and regularly travelling abroad for both public engagements and personal interest. He attended schools in Aotearoa New Zealand and Switzerland, and trained at the Royal Military College Sandhurst in England. He was, in many senses, a ‘man of the world’, one who read a great deal and enjoyed debating matters related to history, religion and international politics of the day. Tupou V’s commercial involvements over many years included owning one of the main telecommunications companies in Tonga, being the Chair of the electricity and water boards, and owning, or part-owning, other smaller firms. To some, this showed a flair for business and entrepreneurship, but in the eyes of others, it showed a sense of entitlement that Tonga’s natural resources should be owned and controlled by the Royal family, who by making money this way would be creating further inequality in Tonga. He had many and varied interests, including producing films, horse riding, cooking and designing military uniforms, both for himself and the Tongan military.

Feleti Sevele explained to me that King George Tupou V was one of the brightest people he had ever met, and that the many talents attributed to him were all true. He could not understand why some people from the western media, as discussed earlier, belittled the King so much.\textsuperscript{219} In reviewing a range of newspaper articles on the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{219} Interview with Lord Feleti (Fred) Sevele, December 2012.
\end{itemize}
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King, I was able to understand his point. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said that Tupou V’s ‘posh British accent and love of remote-controlled boats, toy soldiers and elaborate military garb only cemented his position as the Pacific’s eccentric, lone monarch’. While another article, in the *Guardian*, admitted that in the media Tupou V was portrayed as distant from his people and absorbed with an opulent, international lifestyle, the personal trappings of his princely role, and eccentricities such as acquiring two London black cabs for his personal use.

Without any background information, or evidence, another article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said that ‘In the diplomatic world, Tupou [V] was regarded as something of a parody’, and then it went on to make a false claim about Tonga’s political system, saying that ‘with growing pressures for democracy in the absolute monarchy, riots broke out in November 2006 in the capital, Nuku‘alofa’. In fact, Tonga has never been an absolute monarchy and, it has had elected positions in its parliament since the Constitution was promulgated in 1875.

The death of a King is a significant moment for a country, a people, and a family. The King’s niece, Frederica Tuita, shared her thoughts of breaking the news of


223 Ibid.
Tupou V’s death to her grandmother (his mother) which gives a powerful insight into the way people speak about the King.

Regardless of what you may have heard or read, he was the apple of our grandmother’s eye as he was her first born. Therefore, imagine how difficult the task was when I had to tell Her Majesty the Queen that her firstborn son had passed away in Hong Kong thousands of miles away from her. I had found her at her residence Tufumahina praying with other women for his recovery. I walked in, sat at the door and waited for her to finish praying. After waiting for what seemed like the longest ten minutes of my life, she lifted her head, looked at me and smiled asking why I was there. I bowed my head, got up from the floor by the door and walked over to her past the other women that surrounded her. I sat beside her on the floor and told her … ‘Kuo Hala e Tu’i.’ [The King is dead]. After a moment of silence, I heard the most heart wrenching mournful cry and as much as I wanted to give her a hug, my instincts of respect prohibited me. After a few minutes of crying, she and her ladies in waiting continued praying. She’d come out of prayer from time to time to ask, ‘Do you think God needed him more?’ My heart sank but I was still in shock. I couldn’t shed any tears. After I heard ‘Amen’, she looked up and turned to me as though she had received a new found strength from God and continued to list things that needed to be done and who to contact. I immediately became attentive to what she wanted and proceeded to carry them out.224

The way in which Tupou V was seen by Tongans was at no time more obvious than after his death. Attending Tupou V’s funeral, I could not help but be struck by the massive tensions in the Tongan perceptions of his person. Here was a man who was born and raised to be the King of Tonga but who also spent many years living a playboy

bachelor’s life travelling abroad, seemingly without a care in the world. Yet at the moment of his funeral such individual pursuits and styles seemed irrelevant. The focus was exclusively on the King as King, as the occupant of a divine role and descendant of a long royal lineage. The symbolism of Tupou V after his passing, saw not only the death of him as a person, but also, in many ways, of parts of his personal life and history.

I carefully examined the media coverage of the funeral of King George Tupou V. Many photographs of the proceedings demonstrate the transformation of the King’s life, into symbol, to be remembered as King of Tonga, rather than as an individual as he was during his life. Looking at the selection of images taken from media below, this symbolism is apparent.

![Figure 25. Schoolgirl wipes photo of King George Tupou V](source)

Figure 25 shows a schoolgirl carefully cleaning a portrait of King George Tupou V. Remembered in his military uniform, decorated by medals, with a serious but dignified expression. Figure 26 shows the procession of the King’s body, covered with his emblem, ‘GvT’ emblazoned on a royal canopy, as he is carried by mourning subjects toward his royal tomb. Figure 27 shows the path lined by hundreds of Tongan...
school children, the future of Tonga, covered by metres of precious decorated \textit{ngatu}. Finally, Figure 28 shows the King’s coffin, covered with the Tongan Coat of Arms.

Within each of these images, the individual personality of the King has disappeared, replaced with symbols of Tonga: the flag, the art of tapa, the school children in their matching uniforms, the army uniform and medals and the GvT emblem. These symbols have come to represent the King, who when living represented the Kingdom of Tonga. This funeral procession not only represented the death of a person, but also his immortality as a symbol, the symbol of King George Tupov V, now passed, but also directing the future for Tongans.

\textbf{Figure 26.} King George Tupou V’s casket being carried on a catafalque towards his gravesite

Figure 27. School students seated along pathway lined with tapa cloth leading to King George Tupou V’s gravesite
Source. Photographed by author at the funeral of King George Tupou V, Nuku'alofa, 27 March 2012

Figure 28. King George Tupou V’s casket being carried on a catafalque
Source. Photographed by author at the funeral of King George Tupou V, Nuku'alofa, 27 March 2012

Artistic representations: The King as crown

Another major event that allowed the viewing of how Tongan kingship is experienced as symbol can be seen in the work of Tongan artist Emily Mafile'o who produced *God*
and Tonga are my Inheritance, a series of photographs taken during Tupou VI’s coronation in 2015. Mafile’o took images from three different social positions, allowing the viewer to experience tauhi vā (the Tongan concept of social relationships, in relation to space).

First, Mafile’o shows the coronation from the position of a Tongan commoner. The second image shows how as a media photographer, with a media pass which allowed her a closer look at the events than that of most commoners, she can offer a more intimate view. Finally, she takes images as herself, a Tongan woman connected to friends and family, through portraits of these individuals. In this way, God and Tonga are my Inheritance is focused on Tongan tauhi vā. Her images explore fatongia, the obligations, duties and responsibilities Tongan people inherit, no matter where they live in the world, or where they were born, as they move through intimate, ceremonial and formal spaces. One of the images in this series is seen below (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Emily Mafile‘o, ‘God and Tonga are my Inheritance’


Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, Emily Mafile‘o was born into a mixed family, only one of her parents being Tongan. Having lived most of her life in Aotearoa New Zealand, her focus on the viewpoints of the King’s coronation and crowning allow the viewer to understand the spatial differences Tongan people enact, in an embodied way,
while also demonstrating the powerful symbolism of the King in Tonga, for Tongan people everywhere. Mafile‘o’s identity reflects the diasporic Tongan experience, through her Māori, Pakeha and Tongan heritage, she states:

I find the crossover of tradition and new practices interesting. What is held onto and what is let go. What is new and how it fits in with existing practices. How Tongan people have adapted to living in Aotearoa and how they live their life. Where the Church fits in. How families across generations work together, live together and express their cultural practices. How they work through individual and family obligations. The ongoing support of famili back in Tonga.225

Mafile‘o’s image (Figure 29), taken over the rooftop of an old van, shows a portrait of the royal family, highlighted on a white banner, with a large red crown lit up. The cross atop the crown demonstrates the obligation of the Crown to continue the work of the church, and the symbol of the old and the new coming together. Interestingly, this has more prominence than in the coat of arms (see Figure 30). The history of the missionaries in Tonga is now blended with the monarchy, and the ongoing tradition that suggests how the past is directing the future. The title of her photograph, ‘God and Tonga are my Inheritance’, is taken from the Tongan coat of arms which reads ‘Ko e ‘Otua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofì’a’ (God and Tonga are my Inheritance).226 God, the Church, and the King are one, in symbol and in body, with Tonga—that is, the King is the symbol of Tonga itself, and Tonga is the King, the Church and the people all in one.

Just as the Tongan Coat of Arms was seen in the funeral procession of Tupou V (Figure 30), so too were the many metres of ngatu, laid on the processional path.

225 Taken from the Coconet TV Facebook page. Online: www.facebook.com/thecoconet/posts/929363127200908:0 (accessed 24 June 2018).

Artistic representations: The King in tapa

A second contemporary artwork, titled *Siu i Moana: Reaching Across the Ocean* further reveals the King as symbol in Tonga. This was a collaborative installation of Tongan barkcloth paintings (*ngatu*, widely referred to across Oceania as *tapa*) created by Māori artist Robin White and Tongan artist Ruha Fifita. Anna-Karina Hermkens and Mandy Treagus discuss *ngatu* designs reflecting modern Tonga, stating

> The previous king’s eccentric London taxi appears in one work; tins of corned beef feature in another … the collaborative creative process of working with the earthly materiality, timbre and temporality of barkcloth and traditional dyes, engenders a sense of wholeness. The layers of soft white ngatu, painstakingly painted with metaphoric and symbolic designs, are envisioned by both artists as a spiritual wrapping, bringing people together, regardless of race and age, to bring hope and renewal to the entire community.\(^{227}\)

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The installation features eight recently painted ngatu, made by women in Tongatapu, that feature new paintings by White and Fifita. The artists describe this end product as:

hybrid works that integrate ancestral patterns and design with contemporary imagery and narratives. This is characterised by the use of traditional dyes and painting techniques to depict ideas and stories drawn from current ways of living.228

Figure. 31. Robin White and Ruha Fifita working on ngatu with a women’s group at Haveluloto village, Tongatapu: Atilua Paea, Ovalata Hiuhahau, Siuaki Fakaosileo, Mele Petelo, Silia Leota, Lisipeti Fainu, Kaufusi Moli, Anau Fosita and Seini Ahokovi


Figure 32. *Seen Along the Avenue*, earth pigment and plant dye on barkcloth


This blending of ancestral and contemporary symbolism reflects the monarchy itself. One of the eight *ngatu* in this collection was titled *Seen Along the Avenue* (Figure 32). Designed for the floor, the *ngatu* features the *Hala Paini*, a common design in Tonga which translates to the ‘Pathway of Pines’ which represents the road that travels between the Royal Palace in Tonga, to the royal tombs, which is lined with pines. The cloth, which looks similar to those seen in Figure 27 of a *ngatu* bordered by school children during Tupou V’s funeral, is a contemporary artistic representation of the physical connection between the King, and the spiritual world, blending the physical road that links the Tongan palace to the Royal tombs. This artwork also powerfully serves as a symbol for the connection between King and God, as seen in Mafile'o’s crown topped with the Christian cross. Within the *ngatu* artwork, other symbols are found, including a figure of a black London taxi (as used by the Tongan King (Figure 24)), and a hybrid coat of arms which blends elements from both the Tongan coat of arms, with elements of the coat of arms of Aotearoa New Zealand. Blending traditional *ngatu*, with modern painting and symbols of the King, this work serves as a powerful
symbol of the kingship of Tonga, and the connections and relationships between the past, present and future of the Kingdom of Tonga itself.

**Artistic representations: The King and clothing**

Another artwork, titled ‘King George Tupou was here #2’ also explores the late King as symbol (Figure 33). This work was drawn by Tongan artist Sione Monu, who was born in Auckland, who states,

> Even though I grew up away from the traditions and the community I think that sense of being Tongan and that loaded history of my ancestors is a huge driving force for me as an artist and even just as a person.²²⁹

![Figure 33. Sione Monu, ‘King George Tupou was here #2’, from the exhibition *U Can’t Touch This*, Auckland, 16 July 2015](image)

Source. Sione Monu

The title of his work, ‘King George Tupou was here #2’ demonstrates his engagement with the King, even from Aotearoa New Zealand. Looking more deeply at ‘King George Tupou was here #2’, the viewer sees a black and white sketch that features two dark-skinned busts. The bust on the left, unclothed, is defined by several features: small breasts, short curly hair, eyes, collarbones and a curved mouth. With

their head turned slightly to face the viewer, Figure 33 captivates the viewer with a knowing look. The viewer is, however, unknowing. No answers are given away by Monu; the two busts within this work could be anyone. The title of the work implies the two individuals have a connection with King George Tupou, but this also leaves the viewer asking, ‘which King George Tupou?’, given there have been three.230

The second bust has long hair, tied loosely to the back, with a small mouth, and eyes that look forward. Facing straight toward the viewer, the second bust wears a conservative, flowered garment which exposes only the upper neck and face, covering the arms, elbows and chest. Standing beside a naked bust, the second one appears modest, in comparison. Given the connection with King George Tupou, this could reference King George Tupou I, due to Tongan laws (the Vavu ‘u Code of 1850),231 written during his reign that allowed people who lived in Tonga and who walked shirtless in public to be arrested.232

The second bust, clothed, might also represent the changes brought about in Tonga during King George Tupou I’s reign, during which missionaries and Christianity arrived. Helen Lee explains that ‘in pre-Christian Tonga women did not cover their breasts unless they were pregnant or lactating, but the 1850 Code of Laws made clothing compulsory. Knee-length, sleeved dresses, with ankle-length skirts (vala) underneath, became the most common dress for women.’233 Perhaps the first bust represents Tonga’s premissionary, fluid gender and sexuality, exemplified by the playful smile and tilted head of the first image, while the second might represent today’s

230 Tupou I, Tupou II, and Tupou V each have reference to the name George (Siaosi/Jiaoji) in their names.


232 Ibid.

modest, conservative Tonga, changed by King George Tupou I. The second bust is
clothed and unashamedly facing the viewer directly. Monu’s work embodies historical
as well as contemporary understandings of what it means to be a Tongan person as well
as the symbolic impact of the King on what it actually means to be Tongan. Again, as a
symbol of change and of direction, the Kingship of Tonga is seen in this contemporary
artwork; this time as a powerful force of change within Tongan society, even by
Tongans who do not live within Tonga itself.

**Poetic meditations on the King**

As earlier explained, King George Tupou V was sometimes described as eccentric, even
by people who knew him well. Some who watched him from a distance questioned his
choices, including the use of the black London taxis seen in the *ngatu* artwork earlier
discussed. Tongan poet and writer Karlo Mila explores her understandings of the King
of Tonga, as a symbol of protection and of resistance in her poem, *A Tongan Reflection
on Tino Rangatiratanga*.

**A Tongan Reflection on Tino Rangatiratanga**

I remember I used to feel
Shame
When someone made fun of my King
‘Knickerbockers
Aping European royalty’
They said.
The heavy crowns
On sweating brown brows
The ermine trimming
In stifling heat
The titles of chamberlain
Barons and nobles.

I used to
Feel
Shame.
I did not realize
At the time
The power
Of mimic
As a strategy
Of resistance
The power of
Forcing someone
To recognise power
Because
It is wearing the same clothes
And has a written constitution
I did not realise the power
Of forcing power
To see power
Instead of jigaboos
And savages
Ripe for the colonising.

Even today
It is illegal for a Tongan
To walk shirtless
In public
The paranoia
Of King George the first
The genuine worry
That foreign ships
Would land
Take things into
Their own hands
Put down their flag
Take over.

As preposterous as it seems now
Then, it was the
Done thing.
A King who
Was fully tattooed
Legend has it,
EVERYWHERE
On his body
Who outlawed *tatau*
Wiped it out
In one generation
To secure
An image
To keep us
Secure.

I did not realize
That it was a strategy
Erasing structures and symbols
Seen as savage
Appropriating structures and symbols
Power could recognise
As power.

Now when
There is some
Snide remark
About coronations
Or knickerbockers
Or ‘Kings’ in inverted commas
I wonder
What they
Would prefer.

A King who serves
Cocktails in an island shirt
Plays the ukulele
On fantasy island
‘da plane, da plane, da plane’
ensures the guest houses
are air conditioned
serves sashimi
with fresh mango
with girls in grass skirts
swaying
cocoanat bras
‘come and eat’
‘relax’
‘take a load off’
‘welcome to paradise’
‘come for a ride on my royal golf cart’
Would that
Be more to your liking?

Fuck off
With what you think
Our leadership
Should be like.
For all of its faults
This is
_Tino rangatiratanga_
Manifest
By hook
Or by crook,
By copycat
Or mimic
The knickerbockers
Are part of how
We resisted you.
Shame. #tequicksix.

Karlo Mila

Karlo Mila’s powerful poem demonstrates her understandings of her Tongan King, even though she was raised in Aotearoa New Zealand. The King is seen in her poem as a symbol of protection, as well as survival, and Mila’s words are telling when she explains she did not realise the power of ‘mimic as a strategy of resistance’, of ‘forcing someone to recognise power because it is wearing the same clothes and has a written constitution’, and ‘to see power instead of jigaboos and savages ripe for the colonising.’

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234 Karlo Mila, poem read to attendees of the Tonga Research Association conference, 8–10 July 2013. Unpublished but copy provided by conference organiser.
Born in Rotorua, Aotearoa New Zealand to a Pakeha-Samoan mother and Tongan-Samoan father, Mila’s non-Tongan relatives also had connections to Tonga.235 Her great-grandfather’s second wife was a missionary in Tonga, who taught King Tāufa’āhau Tupou IV.236 Growing up as a Tongan girl in Aotearoa New Zealand, Mila says she
didn’t have that much contact with our Tongan family early on … We went to Tonga twice … It wasn’t until I moved there … that I really started to understand all that I was connected to culturally. That love affair with Tonga and all things Tongan never really ended after that. I wanted to be Tongan. In New Zealand, I was more or less ‘just brown’ or just ‘not-white’—something different. Going to Tonga meant that I could pin some meaning to that otherness … I was sent (to Tonga) to learn Tongan, but my Tongan was pretty limited … being Tongan and engaging with that rich cultural heritage and trying to work out my place within it inspired a lot of poetry … we can hold many cultural resources—Palangi ones, Tongan ones, whatever—and that we can draw down on these in different spaces in different ways.237

These statements help contextualise Mila’s view represented in her poem—remembering King Tupou I as a visionary, a chameleon even, who took whatever action was necessary to ensure the monarchy of Tonga was seen as valid or indeed respected as equal to monarchies of other more powerful nations, in a strategy of survival. Moving between Māori, Pākeha, Samoan and Tongan contexts as a Tongan woman of mixed cultural heritage is not that dissimilar from the path walked by King Tupou I as described in her poem. The ability to ‘blend in’ and to be seen at the same time, is

236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
discussed in her work. Mila’s recognition of King George I’s mimicry and appropriation of international symbols of royalty, power and rule, as a survival tactic, is most poetically expressed, connecting history with the present, when she says:

Even today it is illegal for a Tongan to walk shirtless in public, the paranoia of King George the first, the genuine worry (that) foreign ships would land (and) take things into their own hands, put down their flag, take over … I did not realize that it was a strategy, erasing structures and symbols seen as savage, (and) appropriating structures and symbols power could recognise, as power.238

Mila’s work is influenced by Epeli Hau‘ofa’s understandings of the Pacific, especially ‘making something new’, including ‘new songs and verses’239 through metaphor. Kaeppler writes on the concept of heliaki, a Tongan word similar to the English term, metaphor:

The composer manifests heliaki in metaphor and layered meaning … Hidden meanings must be unravelled layer by layer until they can be understood …The most important Tongan arts are verbal, incorporating social and political philosophy and encapsulating the ideal of indirectness.240

The concept of heliaki can be seen in all of the artworks discussed in this chapter, none directly looking at the King as a symbol of one thing in particular, and most alluding to the many and varied roles that the King—and Tongan Kingship—play in modern and historical Tongan society. The King is, and has always been, a symbol of many things: strength, protection, independence, God, church, people, Tonga, land,

238 Karlo Mila, excerpt from poem read to attendees of the Tonga Research Association conference, 8–10 July 2013. Unpublished but copy provided by conference organiser
responsibility, inheritance, lineage, but also control, dominance, hierarchy, class and disparity. These are the layers referred to in Chapter One. As symbol, these layers of the King of Tonga can be more fully understood as having multiple meanings to the many people of Tonga, commoners, nobles, royals, those born in Tonga and those born outside of Tonga, those who have relationships with their Tongan heritage and those who are still finding their histories. The following poem is one that uses *heliaki* in mourning the passing of Tupou V. It is powerful in its reference to the connection between place and people associated with Tupou V, showing the kinship links to the deceased King.

**Crux Australis weeps: Dedicated to the passing of HM King George Tupou V**

The sun has set and the Crux Australis weeps.  
An aching black silence descends from the sky.  
A white heron bows its heap atop the leafy mane  
of a solitary casuarina overlooking Fanga’uta.  

The stillness of the air broken only by the occasional whisper  
of dust dissipating like prayers from Hihifo to Kolo Kakala.  
Time and fate have honoured these flat and unassuming lands,  
with a legacy second to none.  

‘Eua looms large in the east, lying in the shadows  
of the Ha’amonga ‘a Maui.  
Winds from the north stir the endless fine sands  
and scar the azure waters of the ‘Otu Kinekina.  

The peaks of Kao and Tofua solemnly stand guard in the distance.  
Ha’afeva is silent, no longer does the wind speak  
through the trees around Matahiva.  
Tungua mourns deeply in the sacred knowledge it keeps,  
a single lupe released for Fiji.  

‘Uiha and Pangai gather their grief like kafa and bind it together,  
Tofua’a beach themselves on the mighty shores of Vava’u Lahi,  
they drown with honour in the Lolo’a Halaevalu.  
There is a ring of fire around Niuafo’ou,  
It burns in the hearts of the people.  
The guardians on Niuatoputapu and Tafahi
The symbolism in this poem is a powerful reflection of how Tongans, and indeed many of the peoples of Oceania, express the spirit of their culture. This is often done in reference to natural elements and the way people relate to the sea and land. This chapter has explored a number of different symbols of kingship in artistic form, and this final poem shows the significance of the natural elements in symbolising kingship in Tonga, something that is fundamentally linked to the kinship ties people have that also connect them to specific geography.
Chapter Five

The Consort Queen

His [King George Tupou V’s] reign was unusual. We had never had a King without a wife or children. At first, we didn’t know who to acknowledge in the way we would if the King had a wife. Was it his mother [Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho, the Queen Mother] or his sister? [Princess Pilolevu]. The wife kind of balances things out and without her things don’t quite make sense.241

To understand the kingship system of Tonga one must also understand the place of the consort queen as essential to the functioning of the system. Since the Tupou dynasty officially commenced in 1845,242 Tonga has had five kings and one queen regnant, with all the monarchs, except for King George Tupou V, having a consort. While the Tongan process of royal marriage focuses on the need for building alliances between aristocratic (noble) families, and places great importance on the fertility of suitors to royal princes (and princesses), there are important informal roles played by those who marry into the royal family; roles that shape and influence the place of the monarchy just as much as the formal, constitutional, and ceremonial elements performed by the monarch that are so widely seen and documented (such as the opening of Parliament, the assenting of laws and officially appointing the elected Prime Minister).

This chapter considers the significance of the consort to the Tongan monarch by exploring the position of the current queen consort to King Tupou VI, Queen Nanasipau‘u. By understanding her unique positionality, one is better able to understand the often underrated role the queen consort plays in ensuring the very survival of the

241 Interview with Ana, December 2012.

242 This depends upon whether one sees the promulgation of the 1875 Constitution as the ‘official’ beginning of the Tupou line, or whether it begins with elevation of Tupou I to the Tu‘i Kanokupolu title in 1845.
Tongan kingship system. This chapter will consider questions around what qualifies someone to marry a King, what being the wife of a King means in practice, how the queen consort ranks in relation to other members of the royal family (including how this varies in different contexts), and finally, what Tongans see as the role of the queen consort (and of a King without one).

**Nanasipauʻu Vaea**

The Queen consort, Nanasipauʻu Tukuʻaho (nee Vaea), was born on 8 March 1954, the eldest child and daughter of nobleman Baron Vaea (who became a widely respected and popular Tongan prime minister later in his life), and his wife Baroness Tuputupu Vaea (nee Maʻafu). In the sentence above, I have deliberately highlighted a distinction between being the eldest child and being a daughter, to note the significance of the rank of female members of a family which, while discussed in Chapter Three, will be explored further below to outline how personal (blood) ranking works practically, or at least how it is meant to work practically, within the ranks of the Tongan nobility and royalty.

As the eldest son in a primogeniture system, Nanasipauʻu’s younger brother ‘Alipate Tuʻivanuavou succeeded to his father’s noble title, Vaea, when the Baron died in June of 2009 at the age of eighty-eight years. While Lord Vaea’s title makes him the head of his kāinga, or group of relatives under a chief, his sister outranks him within the family (and outside the family too, due to her status as Queen), because as the eldest

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243 Interview with Princess Angelika Tukuʻaho, no. 2, July 2013.

244 Baron Vaea was Tongan Prime Minister from 1991 to 2000.

245 Vaea is both the title and the name, although the prefix ‘Lord’ has been used since the reign of King George Tupou V (2006–2012) before the names of all Nobles.
daughter her personal or blood rank is higher than that of any of her siblings, especially her brothers. This particularly gives Nanasipau’u a superior status over their children, especially the children of her brothers, in line with the Tongan family ranking of sisters being higher than brothers and the eldest sister having the highest status (see also the discussion on fahu in Chapter Three). In the traditional Tongan ‘api or household and wider kainga kinship, everyone was ranked in relation to others. The ‘relative ‘eiki-tu’a statuses were determined by … fundamental rules of kinship. Sisters (tuofefine) were invariably ‘eiki to their brothers’. Andy Mills determines that these hierarchical principles created relational tapu.

Those who were relatively ‘eiki within the household were relationally tapu to those who were tu’a in relation to them. Thus, male (tuonga’ane) and female (tuofefine) siblings had a strong avoidance relationship because sisters were tapu to brothers … The father’s sister (mehikitanga), as well as having particular rights and privileges in relation to her brother’s children, was tapu to them … the mother’s brother (tuasina) was the focus of the fahu relationship … The grandfather (kui tangata) was … free to interact with his grandchildren … these double-articulated relationships illustrate the parallel redoubling and cancelling-out of tapu or ngofua statuses. Even before her marriage to a royal prince, Nanasipau’u’s noble heritage positioned her as a senior woman in the Tongan nobility. The late Baron Vaea was the son of Vīlai Tupou (half-brother to Queen Sālote Tupou III) and a senior noblewoman,

246 Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, Adrienne Kaeppler and others use these words both together and separately to mean the same thing, that is the rank one has based on the rank of one’s blood ancestors.


248 Ibid.
Tupou Seini. Baron Vaea’s wife, Tuputupu, was the daughter of the Noble Ma’afu. By a
number of bloodlines, Nanasipau'u is a cousin to her husband, King Tupou VI, a
common feature of marriages throughout noble and royal families across the world.
This is especially pronounced for Tongans, given the relatively small population (just
over 100,000 people living in Tonga and around the same number living in the
diaspora), and the even smaller subpopulation of the Tongan nobility, which even at its
broadest interpretation (that is, including the children and grandchildren of Nobles, is
estimated to be less than 1,000 people).²⁴⁹

**Being of the right birth**

In Tonga, being of the right birth to marry into the royal family usually means being
related to them at some level. Commoners are not seen as eligible to marry a member of
the royal family;²⁵⁰ In the case of the current King and Queen, there are at least three
ways they are related. Perhaps the most prominent connection is through their mutual
ancestor, King Tupou II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tupou Moheofo</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>King Tupou II</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Queen Lavinia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vīlai Tupou</td>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Sālote Tupou III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baron Vaea</td>
<td></td>
<td>King Tupou IV</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Nansipau’u</td>
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<td>King Tupou VI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4. Queen Nanasipau'u and King Tupou VI both descend from Tupou II**


²⁴⁹ Interview with Lord Fusu’ta (senior), July 2012.

²⁵⁰ Although some members of the broader royal family in recent years have married commoners, these
members were less senior (not in the first 10) in the Line of Succession. The only recent example of a
senior member of the royal family marrying a commoner is that of Prince ‘Alaivahamama’o, referred to
in Chapter Six.
When Tupou II married his first wife, Queen Lavinia (with whom he later had a child, Sālote), he already had a son named Vīlai Tupou, to the senior chieftainess Tupou Moheofo. To this son, Nanasipau‘u’s father, Siaosi ʻAlipate Tupou (later Baron Vaea), was born. While Vīlai Tupou was not a legitimate son of Tupou II, he was privately and publicly accepted by Queen Sālote as her half-brother, giving him a special status befitting of the rank of his father and of his mother. In this line, Nanasipau‘u’s father was a first cousin by blood to King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV, the father of King Tupou VI (See Table 4). 251

Through another line, where Tupou Moheofo later married Siale ‘Ataongo, there is a connection between Queen Nanasipau‘u and King Tupou VI via the King’s mother, Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho. Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho’s mother, Heuifanga, was first cousin to Baron Vaea (Queen Nanasipau‘u’s father) on his father’s side (See Table 5). 252

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King Tupou II</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Tupou Moheofo</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Siale ‘Ataongo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vilai Tupou</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vaohoi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Baron Vaea</td>
<td></td>
<td>Heuifanga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Nanasipau‘u</td>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>King Tupou VI</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. King Tupou VI’s maternal great-grandmother was Queen Nanasipau‘u’s grandfather’s sister

Through her mother, Baroness Tuputupu, Queen Nanasipau‘u is again related to King Tupou VI. Baroness Tuputupu is the granddaughter of Sione Lamipeti who was

251 Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.

252 Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.
the brother of Mele Siu'ilikutapu, King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV’s grandmother on his father’s side (See Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fanetupouvava'u</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Sunia Mafile'o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mele Siu'ilikutapu</td>
<td>Sione Lamipeti</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tungi Mailefihi</td>
<td>'Anau Kihesina</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Tupou IV</td>
<td>Baroness Tuputupu</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Tupou VI</td>
<td>Queen Nanasipau'u</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u both descend from Fanetupouvava'u and Sunia Mafile'o

Source. Manutu'ufanga Naufahu, July 2015

These relationships are close enough, but not too close, to ensure a well-suited marriage was possible between people of the right birth rank. In Tonga it is unheard of for a King to be married to anyone other than the daughter of a senior nobleman or noblewoman. As Manutu'ufanga Naufahu told me:

And though Queen Nanasi [Nanasipau 'u] was not necessarily the highest ranked woman of her generation, she was very senior in the Tongan nobility which meant if she was to marry a prince, she would be able to hold her own as a princess or even as the queen, as she eventually went on to become, because she was of the right birth rank.

Queen Nanasipau'u’s marriage to King Tupou VI was not unusual in terms of their close kinship ties, and neither was it unusual that a Noble’s daughter would marry

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253 Ibid.

254 I have heard a range of opinions on what is close and what is ‘too close’ when it comes to marriage in Tonga. The general position appears to be that first cousins no longer marry (although this was not uncommon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries).

255 Interview with Manutu'ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.
the King’s son as ‘the ideal in the past has been for noble heirs [and their eldest
daughters] to marry “up”, preferably within the kindreds of the king and [higher ranked]
nobles, or at least to intermarry with the immediate families of other titleholders’. 

As explained to me by a woman I was seated near at the wedding reception of
the current Crown Prince and Crown Princess, on 12 July 2012, Tongans are very clear
about whether a person is ranked appropriately to marry a member of the royal family,
and they do not condone people marrying above their rank without the appropriate
pedigree of their own. The generally accepted view in Tonga is that commoners marry
commoners, nobles marry nobles, except in some cases where senior nobles marry
royals. But the reality on the ground is quite different as many nobles and children of
nobles have married commoners. It was explained to me by one interlocutor that despite
a sense of greater tolerance about this today, many Tongans still believe that it should
be the case that people marry at their own rank level, or slightly above in the case of
someone marrying into the royal family. 

The rank of the Queen consort

In the usual context of official ranking, the Queen consort is the most senior member
of the royal family after the King. That is, in an ‘order of precedence’ she is second,
followed by any living dowager Queen (who in Tonga, as in the United Kingdom, is
referred to as the ‘Queen Mother’), the King’s children, and then, the King’s
grandchildren. This order of precedence, which is applied in many monarchies across

256 George E. Marcus, ‘The nobility and the chiefly tradition in the modern Kingdom of Tonga’, Memoir

257 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 2, December 2012.

258 That is, the orders or precedence in many monarchical systems, such as those in the United Kingdom,
Spain, Sweden and Thailand, for example.

259 A sequential hierarchy of nominal importance of people or items.
the world, acknowledges the official rank of a particular person relative to the monarch, and its variances in specific contexts. This ranking should not be confused with the Line of Succession, which is the official list of those who are next in line to succeed to the throne under the Tongan Constitution.\footnote{Guy Powles, \textit{Political and Constitutional Reform Opens the Door: The Kingdom of Tonga’s Path to Democracy}, Suva: University of South Pacific Press, 2013.}

In Tonga, the Line of Succession is usually recorded and updated on the birth and death of key members of the royal family (see Table 7). According to the Tongan Palace Office, an official order of precedence, however, is not recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HM King Tupou VI (Current occupant of the Throne)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) HRH Crown Prince Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) HRH Prince Taufa’ahau Manumataongo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) HRH Princess Halaevalu Mata’aho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) HRH Princess Nanasipau’u Eliana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) HRH Prince Ata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) HRH Princess Angelika Lātūfuipeka Halaevalu Mata’aho Napua ‘Okalani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) HRH Princess Sālote Mafiloe’o Pilolevu Tuita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Hon. Sālote Lupepau’u Salamasina Purae Vahine Arii ‘Oe Hau Tuita Taione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Hon. Phaedra Anaseini Tupouveihola Ikaleti Olo-i-Fangatapu Fusitu’a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Hon. Titilupe Fanetupouvava’u Tuita Tu’ivakano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) Hon. Simon Tu’iha’atu’unga George Ma’ulupekotofa Tu’ivakano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Hon. Michaela Tu’ivakano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Hon. Fatafehi Tu’ivakano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Hon. Frederica Lupe’uluiva Fatafehi ‘o Lapaha Tuita Filipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) \textit{Hon. Latu’alaifotu’aika Fahina e Paepae Filipe}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) \textit{Hon. Mateialona Josiah Rehua Filipe}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Hon. Lupeolo Halaevalu Moheofo Virginia Rose Tuita Aleamotu’a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Table 7. Line of Succession to the throne of the Kingdom of Tonga}

Source. Initially accessed via the Tonga Ministry of Communications website, but the information is no longer published online. I have kept this list updated with personal knowledge of new births as they happened, although I was not able to get confirmation from the Tongan Palace Office as to whether the two children of Hon. Frederica Filipe, listed at (15) & (16), are officially in the Line of Succession. I have included them anyway.
As with other Pacific Island hierarchies, such as Fiji, where, Christina Toren’s explains, there are two main hierarchical statuses, ‘I cake’ (honoured) and ‘I ra’ (less-honoured) which structure life and relations in Fiji. Fijian people arrange themselves around their status and that of others, whereby ideas of seniority, rank and gender combine. This is described by Toren as beginning in childhood for Fijian children, and she outlines that children learn about status and Fijian social hierarchy from an early age and order themselves accordingly, for example within the seating arrangements in school classrooms.\(^\text{261}\) Within the traditional Tongan hierarchy, the ranking or status of a particular person can change depending on the context, and the example of the current Queen is used below to explain how this works in practice today.

As outlined, Queen Nanasipau’u, while second in the usual order of precedence, is not ranked as such in all contexts. This is because she has a lower personal blood rank than some other individuals in Tonga, and she is not the daughter of a royal prince. Thus there are some contexts where she is tu’a (or lower in status), for example to her sister-in-law, King Tupou VI’s eldest and only sister Princess Sālote Mafíle’o Pilolevu Tuita who is regarded, in terms of genealogy, the “highest ranking female in Tonga”.\(^\text{262}\) The latter example is not entirely unique to Tonga. In the official order of precedence of the United Kingdom,\(^\text{263}\) Queen Elizabeth stipulated that the Duchess of Cambridge (otherwise known as Kate Middleton) is expected to curtsy to the younger cousins of her husband, according to their rank as blood princes and princesses.\(^\text{264}\) The exception


\(^\text{262}\) Personal communication with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, 2018.


to this rule, however, is when she is in the company of her husband, the Duke of Cambridge, Prince William, in which case his cousins must curtsy (if a woman) and bow (if a man) to her and her husband, recognising her rank as the wife of a future King. When Prince William does become King, and his wife queen, she will automatically become the second highest ranked member of the family even though she is not a blood princess. But this relatively simple acknowledgement of the blood (birth) rank of a prince or princess is not nearly as complex as the system in Tonga.

Tonga’s social ranking system goes far deeper than how ‘royal’ one’s blood is, and, in fact, applies to the personal rank of each and every Tongan (not just those of noble or royal birth), including those in the diaspora (although it would be fair to say there is a growing disconnect between some Tongans living overseas, especially amongst those who were born overseas). Elizabeth Wood-Ellem describes the measure of a person’s personal or blood rank being based on the ‘sum total of the rank of one’s ancestors’ and Adrienne Kaeppler, as discussed in Chapter Three, explains that the most pervasive concept in Tongan culture is that of hierarchical ranking. All interpersonal relationships in the island kingdom are governed by principles of rank.

An example of this construct is that a daughter born to a prince and a commoner woman would have a much lower personal rank than a daughter born to a prince and a noblewoman, even if the latter prince was the younger, more junior, brother of the former. Things become more complex when, for example, two noblemen each marry


265 Ibid.


noblewomen and have children (who obviously have noble rank). To an outsider, the
children of both sets of nobles may be viewed as equally ‘noble’ but in Tonga that is
never the case. There is always, in every context, someone who is ‘eiki (superior in
status) and someone who is tu’a (inferior). Therefore, in the case of these two pairs of
nobles, it is almost certain that one of them will have a higher combined rank, because
of an ancestor (or ancestors) being of higher rank than the ancestor/s of the other pair.
This would result in the children of the former pair ranking higher than the children of
the latter pair. This way of determining rank would not be easily maintained in
mainstream Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand, where the average person is not likely
to know their ancestry beyond their own grandparents or great-grandparents. But in
Tonga, people know a great deal about their ancestry, and many of those I interviewed
easily recited the names of their ancestors, three, four and five generations back.

In July 2012, while visiting a small village in the north eastern part of Tonga’s
main island, Tongatapu, I came across an elderly woman selling coconuts (which I
always buy whenever I get the chance) who was kind enough to share with me, after I
bought a couple of her coconuts, some of her village’s history. As we sat in the warm
sun talking, her husband came to say he was going to Nuku’alofa, to which his wife
responded she would stay with ‘the Māori man to teach him some Tongan history’. This
woman, whose name I am ashamed to admit I did not learn during this encounter, spoke
about her family and how they had been caring for the land for many generations. She
asked about my own Māori and Cook Island whakapapa/akapapa and then,
proceeded to tell me how her ancestor was related to the first Tongan King by reciting,
from memory, the names of each ancestor from her mother, through to (what I recall
being) her great-great-great-grandmother. I said to her that even as someone who has

268 Mills, ‘Bodies permeable and divine’.
269 The Māori and Cook Island Māori words for genealogy.
learnt parts of my own *whakapapa*, it was impressive that she could name five
generations of her ancestors simply from memory, to which she replied she could go
back even further on her father’s side, and she could also recite the same for her
husband’s mother’s and father’s lines too. This depth of genealogical knowledge was
commonly held by older Tongans I spoke to, both formally in interviews, and casually,
in situations such as this, during my several field work visits to Tonga.

There was a consensus among those I interviewed that it was simply ‘known’
who ranked higher than others, depending on the context, and that this ‘did not need to
be written down’. Even so, in my observations and conversations in Tonga and
amongst the Tongan diaspora, while people clearly understood who ranked higher than
who in general society (and while everyone accepted that nobles ranked higher than
commoners and royals ranked higher than nobles), it appears that the subtleties of the
ranking of members of the royal family relative to each other were not as clearly known
or understood by the majority.

Unlike the monarchies of the United Kingdom and Thailand, the context within
which any order of precedence operates appears to change frequently in the Tongan
Kingdom, depending on the specific occasion, and which members of the royal family
are present on each occasion. In my observations at a number of events in Tonga and in
the diaspora I noted what seemed to be subtle changes in the ranking system. For
example, at an official parliamentary/government-sponsored event, the order of
precedence appeared to look like this:

1. The King
2. The Queen
3. The Queen Mother
4. The King’s children
5. The King’s grandchildren
6. The King’s sister

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270 Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, July 2015.
7. The King’s sister’s children
8. The King’s sister’s grandchildren
9. The King’s brother’s children
10. The Prime Minister
11. The Speaker
12. Nobles

But in many other ceremonial events in the community, and in the villages, or even those hosted by the royal family, the order of precedence usually looks like this:

1. The King
2. The Queen
3. The Queen Mother
4. The King’s sister
5. The King’s children
6. The King’s grandchildren
7. The King’s first cousins
8. The King’s brother (Ma’atu’s) eldest son
9. The King’s sister’s children
10. The King’s brother (Ma’atu’s) other children
11. The King’s sister’s grandchildren
12. Nobles

Ana explained that the order could be different in some ceremonial contexts where, for example, the King’s sister’s status is elevated by her blood rank (as the daughter and sister of kings).²⁷¹

1. The King
2. The Queen Mother
3. The King’s sister
4. The Queen
5. The King’s children
6. The King’s grandchildren
7. The King’s sister’s children
8. The King’s brother’s children
9. Nobles

²⁷¹ Interview with Ana, December 2012.
Going one step further, in a more strict interpretation of the appropriate Tongan context, recognising the personal blood rank of all individuals results in another different ranking order (changed according to context). In such a context, the general ranking order would look like this:

1. The King
2. The Queen Mother
3. The King’s sister
4. The King’s sister’s children
5. The Queen
6. The King’s children
7. The King’s grandchildren
8. The King’s paternal first cousins
9. The King’s brother’s children
10. The King’s sister’s grandchildren

I return here to photographs from Chapter Three (Figures 22 and 23) which show Queen Nanasiapau’u, then as Crown Princess, seated on the ground at the funeral of her mehitanga, Vaohoi, while at the same time her mother-in-law, the Queen Mother, and her niece, Lupepau’u Tuita, were seated on chairs in a small marquee/shelter. The then Crown Princess chose to acknowledge her liongi status, that is a status of being lowly in relation to the deceased, rather than be seated with her mother-in-law and niece where she could rightfully have sat as a senior member of the royal family. Naufahu explained to me that the then Crown Princess was demonstrating her personal commitment to respecting her fahu in line with anga fakatonga.\textsuperscript{272} I repeat these photographs here to demonstrate my point (Figures 34 and 35).

\textsuperscript{272} Interview with Manutu’ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.
Figure 34. The then Crown Princess Nanaipau'u seated on ground at funeral of her aunt Vaohoi

Source. Manutu'ufanga Naufahu Facebook. Used with permission.

Figure 35. The Queen Mother (Nanasipau'u's mother-in-law), and Hon Lupepau'u Tuita (Nanasipau'u’s niece) seated at the funeral of Vaohoi

Source. Manutu'ufanga Naufahu, Facebook. Used with permission.
Noting the higher blood rank of women within the family, this is what the personal blood rank of the royal family would look like, if ranked strictly in accordance with personal blood rank: *

1. The King’s sister (although it was argued that the King’s eldest female paternal first cousin ranks either alongside or directly below his sister)
2. The King’s sister’s eldest daughter **
3. The King
4. The King’s daughter
5. The King’s sons
6. The King’s grandchildren
7. The King’s paternal first cousins (noting the point above about his eldest female paternal first cousin)
8. The King’s brother’s children
9. The King’s sister’s grandchildren
10. The Queen Mother

**11. The Queen**

*= In reality, this ranking system is only very infrequently given practical life, an example being after the death of the late King George Tupou V, when female members of his family had their hair cut as a public expression of their close but inferior relationship to the King, it was the King’s only sister, and his eldest female first cousin on his father’s side, who cut the hair.

** = In a strict hierarchical sense, the eldest daughter of the King’s sister (who is his eldest sister) has superior personal blood rank to anyone other than her mother, and her eldest (and only) daughter has a superior personal blood rank to anyone other than her mother and grandmother (although on top of the female/male distinction, there is sometimes also a generational one). Indeed, there is no general rule for how many generations this ranking system would work, as it becomes hard to know as the generations go by with so many different intermarriages eventually crossover occurs.

The King’s sister, Princess Pilolevu, has no mehikitanga as her father had no sisters, and some people I spoke with said she in fact has no fahu given her father had no paternal aunt.273 This anomaly in any typical Tongan family might mean the person without direct aunts/great aunts would then look to great-great aunts (and their descendants) to identify who their fahu is, but in the case of someone of such

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273 Interview with Ana, December 2012.
unparalleled high rank, that is unnecessary because it is unlikely anyone so distant could act as fahu of someone in such a position.\textsuperscript{274}

As has been described, the fluidity of the ranking systems (particularly for the Queen consort and dowager Queen given they are not holders of these positions because of their blood rank), means that in the current Royal Family, Queen Nanasipau'u does not always have the second highest rank (as would be the case for the consort to the British or Thai monarch, for example).\textsuperscript{275} The fact that there is such diversity/contextual variation within the ranking system means that all those who are in the system are hyperalert and sensitive to the distinctions.\textsuperscript{276}

**Balancing kingship: Born to be queen**

I have met Queen Nanasipau'u a number of times in Canberra, Auckland and Tonga over recent years, and interviewed her with the King for this thesis at their home estate of Liukava, near Kolovai on Tongatapu. She is a softly spoken, gracious, somewhat shy, person who is widely seen as a conservative and traditionalist. Indeed, some people I interviewed suggested she was too focused on holding on to the old ways, while others believe she is simply doing what a good Queen should do by protecting the heritage of Tonga and its royal and noble families. It seems to me that the Queen is a powerful role model for maintaining the customs and practices of Tonga, and particularly in respect of royalty and nobility. She is also a devout Christian who is widely respected for her clear attempts to maintain the close links between the monarchy and the (Free Wesleyan) Church.

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{276} Ibid.
I have a particularly strong memory of Queen Nanasipau’u walking down the aisle of the Centenary Church in Saione, Nuku’alofa during the Coronation ceremony for her and her husband. This momentous occasion held in a church full of local Tongan leaders and dignitaries from across the Pacific and around the world, including the Crown Prince and Princess of Japan, felt so solemn and historic. It struck me as the Queen walked slowly down the aisle with an expression of both humility and pride (if it is possible to express both at the same time) that she carried just as much history on her shoulders as her husband, the King. Indeed, as I watched her flowing down the aisle in a regal gown, it occurred to me that her place in the entire process of kingship is integral to the survival of the monarchy in Tonga, not simply because of the fact that the King’s children and grandchildren were only made possible through her, but also, as was discussed by some of my interlocutors, because some Tongans see kingship as not entirely complete without a queen.

Figure 36. King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau’u at their Coronation ceremony, Nuku’alofa. July 2015
Source. Tonga Palace Office. Used with permission

277 Indeed her son, Crown Prince Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala will one day be King himself.
Although I wrote extensively on the kingship of King George Tupou V in Chapter Four, one thing that was not examined there (as I felt it would fit better in this chapter) was the view that a monarch without a consort was, in the view of some, diminished. This is about more than simply seeing the role of the consort as a procreator of children, as important as that is, especially in the case of a monarchy. It is about understanding the important symbolic role the consort has, as companion to the monarch and in the practical roles, such as being present to open significant sites, presiding over family and national events, the consort ensures a balance in the duties and role of the monarch. Apart from the crucial role Queen Nanasipau‘u has as mother to the King’s children, she also brings a depth of experience as a Tongan woman, and someone raised in the upper echelons of the Tongan nobility. She also brings her own lineage, associated supporters (with reciprocal responsibilities), and is the one person who helps to carry the monarchy, as her husband’s closest advisor and confidante.

Figure 37. King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau‘u at the Thai King’s funeral, Grand Palace, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017
Source. Tonga Palace Office. Used with permission
As Queen Nanasipau‘u walked down the aisle at her Coronation, I saw tears streaming down the face of one of her close relatives, who I had met before and who was in my line of sight at the ceremony. Near this woman were her own children and other family members, all displaying the depth of emotion they clearly felt at seeing their close kin officially recognised in this historic ceremony. I happened to be walking out of the church near that same person after the ceremony, and while I was filming the masses of people on my phone, she asked me what I thought about the occasion. I said I was honoured to witness this historical day. When I asked her what she thought, her response was heartfelt.

I was overcome with joy to be here to see our King and our Queen crowned. I could not stop the tears flowing. I don’t know where they were coming from but they just came out. They would not stop.

‘And what was it that really brought these tears out from you?’ I asked.

I guess it was seeing the Queen, Nanasipau‘u, and knowing that she has been there for the King and the Royal Family as the one to ensure the monarchy will go on into the future. I was so proud for her and for who she is and for her place in our history. But for sure it is the new King who carries Tonga now, but for sure it is the Queen who helps to bear the load. This is a very beautiful day for Tonga.278

In many ways Nansipau‘u was elevated to the position of queen consort having had more preparation than anyone else for the role. At age sixty-one, Nanasipau‘u was the eldest person to be crowned queen consort in the history of the Tongan monarchy, but quite the opposite of being too old, the queen was both ready and ripe for the role she was eminently qualified to undertake. No queen consort had ever had the life experience, associated with her age, that she did when she was crowned. One person I

278 Interview with Seini, July 2015.
spoke with suggested that Nanasipau‘u was always ‘destined to be Queen one day’, noting the widely accepted view that she was one of the few eligible suitors to King George Tupou V when he was a younger prince.

There was an expectation that the Crown Prince [later King George Tupou V] would marry someone of appropriate high ranking, and of course Nanasipau‘u was one of the few. There were probably only two or three but he did not want to marry any of them, instead refraining from marriage leaving them to find others of lesser rank to marry. But Nanasipau‘u was raised well and she was not going to marry just any noble and in the end she got the prize. She married the youngest son of King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV and Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho and not only was he good looking, but he was next in line shortly after they married because his other brother was stripped of his royal inheritance for marrying a commoner.

My interpretation of the above quote was not that Nanasipau‘u was intent on pursuing the royal sons, but that she was only ever going to marry at the right level, something people have said she insists upon for her own children. The ‘right level’ can, of course, be interpreted differently depending on how one measures suitability for marriage, but few people could doubt Nanasipau‘u’s suitability to marry a prince of Tonga, and that is what she did in December 1982, giving birth to their first child, Princess Angelika, less than a year later in November 1983. In September 1985, their second child, Prince ‘Ahoeitu (now Crown Prince Tupouto‘a Ulukalala) was born, followed by the birth in April 1988 of Prince Viliami (now Prince Ata). Just as her own upbringing was steeped in the protocols and traditions of Tongan nobility,

279 Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 3, July 2015.

280 Ibid.

281 Interview with Princess Angelika Tuku’aho, no. 2, July 2013.

282 Ibid.
Nanasipauʻu raised her three children in line with *anga fakatonga* and the *kavei koula* (golden pillars) referred to in Chapter Three.283

**Tongan perspectives on the role of the Queen Consort**

The role of the consort is not one that has been widely written about in Tonga. Indeed it is often the case across the world that the wives of kings and presidents, as they have tended to be (and are usually still are, men), are seen as simply as an appendage to their husbands. Such a view is both unfair and incorrect, and no less so than in Tonga where the consort is integral to Tongan kingship and plays a powerful role in the broader Tongan kinship system in which kingship is grounded (see Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King Tupou I</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Queen Sālote Lupepauʻu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King Tupou II</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Queen Edith Marie Pomare-vahine</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Lavinia</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Anaseini Takipō</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queen Sālote</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Prince Tungi Mailefihi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Taufaʻahau Tupou IV</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Queen Havaevalu Mataʻaho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King George Tupou V</td>
<td>=</td>
<td><em>No wife</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Tupou VI</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Queen Nanasipauʻu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8. Consorts of the Tongan monarch*

Source. Developed by the author after interviews and conversations with various interlocutors

Many people I interviewed shared their thoughts on either Queen Nanasipauʻu herself, previous queen consorts, or, on the role of the consort in general. There were four common themes about the consort that emerged in my interviews with Tongan people. The first was that the queen consort fulfils an important function as the ‘other half’ of the King (in a society that is very focused on heterosexual and child-producing kinship); second, the queen consort assists the King in maintaining the monarchy and ensuring its survival; third, the queen consort has a role in strengthening the nobility

283 Interview with Manutu ufanga Naufahu, no. 3, July 2015.
(herself being a noblewoman means she understands, and is loyal to, the place of the nobility in Tongan society); and fourth, the queen ensures there is balance in the royal household simply by being able to do things and relate to things in a way that the King is not able to (either due to perceptions of his sacredness, his position as the son of another King, the limits of his experiences outside of the royal court, and the fact he is a man who cannot understand the business that pertains to women). In one interview it was explained to me that Tongans see the role of the consort queen as an important acknowledgement that the monarchy can only survive into the future if it has the right kinship relations.

If the King chooses not to marry a senior [noble] woman, as G5 [King George Tupou V] chose not to, people will wonder if he does not care about continuing the purity of the line of the monarchy. Mind you, in G5’s case not marrying at all was probably a better move than marrying a commoner or marrying a palangi, as that would have been an insult to the nobility, and some might say it could have ‘contaminated’ the bloodline.

Queen Nanasipau'u was seen as eminently suitable to be the wife of a prince (or King) because not only was she someone who was raised as a potential suitor to a future King, she was someone ‘the nobility could genuinely say to the royal family “here is a most suitable bride” now the ball is in your court’. In a sense, she was raised to be a potential bride of a royal to keep the link strong between the nobility and royalty, and also to keep the ‘bloodline’ pure. Interestingly, it is often seen as one of the roles of the queen (consort and regnant) to guide the royal family and nobility to make appropriate marriage alliances.

284 These developed from my field journal notes gathered from June 2011 to December 2014.
285 Interview with Ana, December 2012.
286 Ibid.
Queen Sālote played a key role in bringing together noble families and arranging marriages where possible to bridge alliances between families. To a lesser extent Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho did the same, and … I think Queen Nanasipau'u would be a very good alliance maker because she knows the history and she knows who is who. She has an exceptional appreciation for the subtlety of rank and relationship in Tonga.

The Queen’s personal status as wife of the monarch carries a number of important obligations. While her rank changes relative to some other members of the royal family in different contexts, it is never higher than that of the King who is only outranked in one context, by his older sister and her eldest daughter, because, as discussed in Chapter Four, the King’s body has an intrinsic level of tapu and mana that elevates him above all other living Tongans. And while the Queen is not the second highest ranked person in Tonga in all cases, her position as the other half of a partnership that upholds the monarchy is one that is highly valued by many Tongans. Our new King may do the same [as his older brother and father before him] and become the King he was meant to be and lead us into a new era of change. His wife will become as God intended, as…Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho became, the heart of our nation.

Indeed, this chapter argues that rather than simply being the one who carries the children of the King, and therefore ensuring the survival of the family line, the Queen is the primary person Tongans see as supporting the King to perpetuate the existence of the monarchy as an embedded in broader relations of kinship. The place of the Queen consort is essential to the functioning of the kingship system and the union between

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287 Interview with Manutu‘ufanga Naufahau, no. 3, July 2015.


289 Interview with Ana, December 2012.
King and Queen is far more than a union of individuals, but the coming together and strengthening of kinship groups.
Chapter Six

Expanding Tongan Kin(g)ship

For a moment I felt as if I was in Tonga. The people, the ta’ovala, the music, the language, and the food were all what I thought of as Tongan. It was just like being in Tonga ...

But where exactly is Tonga anyway? Could it be here at this event, in this hall full of Tongans?

One of the speakers said, ‘We carry the Kingdom [of Tonga] inside each of us’, so if it is the case that they take Tonga with them wherever they go, does that mean Tonga is also here in Canberra? (Fieldwork journal, Canberra, 1 April 2014).

The above is an excerpt from notes in my fieldwork journal after an event at the Albert Hall in Yarralumla, Canberra in 2014. The event was a fundraiser hosted by the High Commission of Tonga in Australia to raise money for the communities most affected by Cyclone Ian, the category five severe tropical cyclone that caused widespread destruction in the Ha’apai group of islands in Tonga. Having attended many events in Tonga and in the Tongan diaspora in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand during the early stages of my PhD research, I was somewhat surprised that this occasion, which was in the city I called home in Australia, prompted so many new questions about my understanding of what it meant to be ‘Tongan’ outside of the geographic boundaries of ‘Tonga’.

On this occasion, the large Albert Hall was full and included around two hundred Canberra/Australia-based Tongans from all walks of life. There were young children,

290 Ta’ovala is a Tongan waist mat.

mums and dads, elders, diplomats and Tongan royalty. Given the presence of royalty (the High Commissioner of Tonga to Australia is the King’s daughter, Princess Angelika), you could see a clear distinction in the seating arrangements, with royals seated in a prominent position near the front of the Hall, and others seated either on less prominent chairs or choosing to sit on the floor. Another level of formality was expressed in the clothing worn by those in attendance—most were wearing formal clothes as well as a taʻovala. The evening program included some speeches (given entirely in Tongan without translation), and all the songs and performances were in Tongan too. The food was clearly Tongan themed with pork, taro and kumala (sweet potato) on the menu, and the quantities were of the levels I had experienced many times on my travels in Tonga, where hosts put on generous feasts for their guests. Indeed, the whole atmosphere at this event was very Tongan to me and even the temperature in the Hall was unusually warm for an April evening in Canberra, perhaps in part due to there being so many people inside, added to by spontaneous bursts of dancing where most of the gathering were up on their feet expressing themselves with bouts of energy and laughter.

‘For a moment, I felt as if I was in Tonga’ and ‘where exactly is Tonga anyway?’ are the particular entries from my fieldwork journal notes of that evening that inspired this chapter. In this chapter I will explore questions around who, what and where is Tonga. I will begin by situating Tonga as part of what Epeli Hau'ofa aptly describes as an ‘expanding Oceania’ and discussing differing perspectives of my interlocutors regarding Tonga as both a small and insignificant and diminishing group of islands, or a growing and spreading transnation in a shrinking world. This chapter will consider two divergent perspectives on globalisation: one, that globalisation is making Tonga smaller and more insignificant as a player on the world stage, and the other that the breaking down of borders and spread of Tongan migration is actually

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expanding Tonga and making it a bigger and more significant player than it ever has been. This chapter will consider Tongan global identity by looking at ways Tongans engage and express themselves and their identity, including how they traverse social media on the internet as confidently and comfortably as their ancestors traversed the waves of the great Pacific Ocean. I conclude by considering what it means to be the King of Tonga in a transnational, globalised era.

**Globalisation and transnationalism**

While Lee has written that ‘little attention has been paid…on ‘return’ migration and transnationalism’ of Tongan young people, the concept of movement has been core to Pacific cultures for time immemorial. The concept of movement has been written on by Tongan, Pacific and non-Indigenous scholars alike, with a variety of views regarding Tongan transnationalism. Over a decade ago, ‘Esau wrote on the experiences of Tongan immigrants in New Zealand, their migration decision-making processes and their maintenance of transnational networks at home in Tonga. ‘Esau found that despite the continuing links Tongans living in New Zealand maintained with their home country, many Tongan immigrants did not wish to return to Tonga permanently. Flanagan, too, looked at the work of Tongan writers Pesi Fonua and Epeli Hau'ofa and concluded that migration to and from Tonga has in fact created a dynamic Tonga, rather than a static one. Most notably, Tēvita O. Ka’ili has written on the concept of tauhi vā, and Tongan sociospatial ties:


‘as a Tongan with genealogical ties to Koloa (one of my ancestor Maui’s home islands in Tonga…As I pondered Maui’s presence in all of the Moana islands… how he kept ties with all of them… how Maui sustained relationships with many of his relatives who were dispersed yet connected across distant physical spaces’. 296

Such relationships, as demonstrated by Maui, have existed for centuries for Pacific Islanders. The movement of our peoples across the ocean to various islands, being connected across vast spaces and distances, has been the reality for our people for centuries. For the Tongan people I spoke with, the concept of ‘transnationalism’ did not appear to be a concept they saw as core to their experience in the modern world, because it has been a part of ‘being Tongan’ since Tonga was fished up by Maui. As Ka’ili states, ‘in the history of the world, the Moana people were unsurpassed in their ability to venture into distant and unknown spaces…their long-distance travels made them one of the most widely settled peoples in the world…their ability to travel long distances allowed them to link distant island communities and establish far-reaching exchange and social networks’. 297

It is obvious that Tongan migration and transnationalism is shaped by Tongans’ past history of movement and settlement across vast areas and spaces. This concept, termed vā, meaning the space in between, is common to Tongans, and my own Maori and Cook Island/Tahitian family, along with Sāmoa and Hawai‘i (where it is known as wā). This focus, on the space that links, rather than separates, is the truly under-researched notion, not transnationalism, which is arguably a Western way of viewing an


297 Ibib. pp. 85 – 86.
ancient and well-understood idea of movement by Pacific Islanders. As Ka‘ili states, almost no academic attention has been given to this ‘Moanan notion of space’, yet it is this space between, and, the cultural practices of maintaining relations through this space (including through reciprocal acts of gifting and sending resources) that has allowed the strong bonds of Tongan and Moanan societies to continue, as they have since Maui traversed Moana.

The word ‘transnationalism’ only came up in one interview that I conducted for this PhD thesis. It was with Falekava Kupu, a Tongan diplomat based in Australia, where he was talking about the role of the King as head of a kinship system.

The King’s role goes beyond the traditional borders of Tonga, because Tongans are now living all around the world. Instead of him being the King of the ‘Tongan nation’, he is King of the ‘Tongan nationals’. And these Tongan nationals are also living overseas, and some are born there. So they are also nationals of other counties making them transnationals. Have you heard the word transnationalism? That’s what’s happening with Tongans. And the King is the King of all Tongans no matter what nation they actually live in.

Globalisation, however, is a word I heard much more during my research. It would be fair to say there were a range of views on what globalisation meant, and then a whole range of views about whether globalisation was a good thing or a bad thing for Tonga. In one interview, I was told that globalisation had made Tonga a ‘watered down’ version of itself because things that were traditionally valued by Tongans now had to compete with other more accessible or cheaper options. Food was an example of this,

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298 Ibib. p. 89.

299 Ibid.

300 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.

301 Interview with Ana, December 2012.
where I was told that the traditional Tongan diet had been replaced by less healthy ‘Western foods that were cheaper’. Indeed, it is widely known that ‘changes to Tongan culture and influences brought about by increasing westernisation, globalisation, urbanisation and economic factors have negatively impacted on diet, physical activity and obesity in Tonga.’ I also recall how another interlocutor felt that globalisation was contributing to a loss of the unique Tongan identity.

**Tongans as voyagers**

Katerina Teaiwa writes that “the Pacific has been profoundly shaped by both travel and emplacement” and Falekava Kupu explained to me that Tongans have long been globally connected people who moved across borders for survival. Indeed, for centuries Tongans have travelled far and wide across Oceania. While most Oceanic peoples descend from maritime navigators, ‘the Tongan state was the only maritime polity in Oceania to encompass an entire archipelago and, through long-distance voyaging … extend its influence to other island groups’.

Archaeologists have found evidence that as early as A.D. 1200 Tongans were undertaking long-distance economic

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302 Ibid.


305 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.

and political exchanges with other island societies across the Pacific.\textsuperscript{307} A number of my interlocutors spoke about this and the ancient stories they had learned about Tongan chiefs travelling to build the Tongan empire by both conquest and alliance building, with some expressing great pride in the knowledge that their ancestors once exercised significant influence over parts of neighbouring Samoa and Fiji.\textsuperscript{308}

Alliance-building through marriages has always been a core part of the Tongan kinship system, particularly between key chiefly families in the Pacific. The links between Tonga and Samoa are described as so ancient, that they are recognised in the mythology of both archipelagos.\textsuperscript{309}

The intermarriage of their ruling families suggests that for certain periods these families were the exogamous moieties of one royal race … A Samoan orator summed it up in the mid-19th century: ‘We are your friends, your sons and daughters. You know that Tonga chiefs are chiefs here, and Samoa chiefs are chiefs at Tonga’.\textsuperscript{310}

Samoa is remembered as part of the pre-colonial Tongan empire before it was expelled by the fifteenth Tu'i Tonga:

According to the corpus of Samoan historical traditions the Samoans were subject to the Tu'i Tonga from the reign of Asoaitu (‘Aho eitu) to the reign of Tala'aifeti’i (Talakaifaiaki). The latter … a man-eating despot, was driven out by the first Malietoa and his brothers.\textsuperscript{311}

\textsuperscript{307} Clark et al., ‘Stone tools from the ancient Tongan state reveal prehistoric interaction centers in the Central Pacific’.

\textsuperscript{308} Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 1, July 2012.


\textsuperscript{311} Ibid.
Indeed, the Tuʻi Tonga Takalaua, his sons and even his grandsons are all recorded as being married to Samoan women and mostly having lived in Samoa.\textsuperscript{312} These ancient intermarriages have continued throughout time and continue in modern Tonga, even through the decades of wars between Samoa and Tonga over land and fishing rights in the late 1700s into the 1800s, although these were not as frequent as the wars between Tonga and Fiji.\textsuperscript{313} It is worth noting that the connection between Tonga and Samoa has impacted not only on lines of kinship and chiefly rule of both countries over centuries, but the deep connections between Samoa and Tonga are also seen to have enabled a deeper penetration of missionaries within Samoa. ‘It was those Samoan chiefly families with Tongan connections or affiliations who were the first to embrace Wesleyan Methodism in Tonga and who repudiated the congregationalism of the London Missionary Society’.\textsuperscript{314} One of the many examples of how other Islands have influenced life in Tonga can be seen in commonalities between, for example, the Samoan language and terms such as \textit{lea fakatonga}, as well as in dance, performance and architecture.\textsuperscript{315} For example, one of the most valued personal possessions a Tongan can have is the \textit{taʻovala} or waist mat, which originated in Samoa dating back to the epoch of the Tongan empire. To this day the finest quality \textit{taʻovala} are commissioned to be made by Samoan women in Samoa.\textsuperscript{316}

Fiji and Tonga similarly have also had a long connection as Pacific Island neighbours. The close bonds between some chiefly families in Fiji are the result of

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\textsuperscript{313} Gunson, ‘The Tonga-Samoan connection 1777–1845’.

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{316} Interview with Angelika Tukuʻaho, no. 2, July 2013.
centuries of inter-marriage and for earlier epochs war and conquest. Jukka Siikala states that, ‘In Fijian clan structure outsiders, mainly Tongans, have always played a central role.’ The archaic Tongan state is the only known polity in Oceania reputed to have extended its reach not only over the entire archipelago but to islands beyond its borders such as Samoa and Fiji. The voyaging reach of Tonga in deeper history is still being uncovered today. While inter-island warfare led by the twenty-fourth Tu’i Tonga is well-documented, recent archaeological research indicates that Paepaeotele’a (the royal tomb and monument of the Tongan state) was built as early as A.D. 1300, more than 200 years earlier than its traditional association with Uluakimata I. As Geoffrey Clark, Christian Reepmeyer and Nivaleti Melekiola explain,

The geochemical signatures of stone tools associated with the tomb indicate long-distance voyaging. The evidence suggests that the early Tongan state was a powerful and geographically expansive entity, able to rapidly organise and command the resources of the scattered archipelago.

These findings indicate very early long-distance travels and interactions between Tonga, Fiji and Samoa indicating that ‘long-distance voyaging, strategic marriage alliances and impressive monumental architecture were a feature of the early Tongan

Today, intermarriages continue to strengthen Tongan kingship. One Tongan royal remarked,

    My Uncle (Ma’atu) and Aunt (Alaileula) were both a natural and arranged partnership.
    In many ways they fell in love, but it was also important because my grandfather [King Taufa’ahau Tupou IV] wanted my uncle to marry outside of Tonga but it had to be with someone from a chiefly family in the Pacific. He always said this was a continuation of a long history of marriage alliances across the Pacific.\textsuperscript{322}

**Tongans in the world today**

It came as no surprise to me to learn that today there are just as many Tongans living outside of Tonga as there are in Tonga, given the length of time Tonga has engaged in Pacific voyaging and intermarriage with other Pacific Islands. Siikala wrote that

    Tongans are, in a sense, everywhere and continue to disperse to new areas of the world through new channels. Their economic possibilities far exceed the island’s resources … While the royal and noble influence is contained inside the borders of the Kingdom of Tonga, the commoners are able to make use of global opportunities which transcend national borders.\textsuperscript{323}

    Given the length of time Tongans have been voyaging, intermarrying and sending Tongans to live away from Tonga (often for educational or employment opportunities), it is paradoxical to consider Tonga’s long-established policies to protect itself from the influence of foreigners. There has only ever been a limited acceptance of the place of foreigners within Tongan society. Only Tongans can own land in Tonga and there are limits on non-Tongan involvement in state affairs. Under Tupou I’s law

\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., p. 1050.

\textsuperscript{322} Interview with Lupepau’u Tuitajuly 2012.

\textsuperscript{323} Siikala, ‘Hierarchy and power in the Pacific’, p. 219
that Tongan land cannot be sold to outsiders, discussed in Chapter 2, intermarriages between Tongans and outsiders have resulted in a form of surrogate ownership, marriages instead of the right to purchase Tongan land and the development of dual-citizenship for many Tongan nationals. Tony Muller explains:

Tongan law meant that a Tongan woman took on the nationality of her husband, as did any children from that marriage. The intention of this law was to stop Europeans marrying Tongan women, and then being able to own land through their wife or children. These laws … worked well at the time to prevent Tonga succumbing to foreign ownership.\(^{324}\)

Of course, while this and other moves have in some ways maintained Tonga’s independence, the flip side is that Tonga is actually reliant on foreign states for support in many other ways, and Tongan peoples are further connected to lands other than Tonga and are heavily reliant on the aid from countries like Japan, and soft loans from China—a country with a growing influence in Oceania and, indeed, the world. Tonga’s reliance on this external support has caused significant debate both internally and by commentators on the region. During my interview with the Speaker of the Tongan Parliament, Lord Fakafanua, he acknowledged that China was an important strategic partner for Tonga and while there was a clear imbalance, in that China is such a large and powerful nation compared with Tonga, there was little risk of China negatively impacting on Tonga’s system of kinship.\(^{325}\) However, Ana expressed a concern about China’s rising influence saying that ‘Tonga’s identity as a country is changing and it will continue to do so if the government maintains its pattern of becoming indebted to

\(^{324}\) Tony Muller, *From Prussia to the Pacific: The Guttenbeil Family of Tonga*, Auckland: Express Communications, 2013, p. 34.

\(^{325}\) Interview with Lord Fakafanua, December 2012.
China’. It has also been reported that ‘many business owners felt “helpless” and held to ransom by China’, and some locals interviewed by the *Australian* ‘felt they had been sold out by the Tongan government’ for receiving lavish gifts from China (including a large fleet of black limousines in 2015 which I was shown by a government official on a trip to Tonga) and for taking on insurmountable levels of debt. These concerns are valid given that Tonga, according to Anthony Klan

has $269m in total public debt, of which $237.7m is foreign debt—44 per cent of GDP.

Of that foreign debt, $143.7m, or 60 per cent, is owed to China with almost all the rest owed to the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

It is, in many ways, a myth that Tonga is a fully independent nation in the Pacific, just as it is a myth that Tonga was never colonised. If the role of the Christian missionaries in bringing Christianity to Tonga was not an aspect of colonialism, then what was it?

In 1826, a mission party led by John Thomas from the Wesleyan Methodist church in London arrived in Tonga. This heralded the wide adoption of Christianity in Tonga. From this point onwards, Tongan people began to convert from their indigenous belief systems to Christianity after the paramount chief Taufa‘ahau became a Christian (in about 1829), culminating in his decision to be baptised in 1831.

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326 Interview with Ana, December 2012.


328 Ibid.

329 Ibid.
Taufa‘āhau took the name ‘King George’, because he heard from the missionaries about King George III of England, and greatly admired him. Recording his baptism, Thomas wrote in a large and bold handwriting ‘George Taufa‘āhau, King in Lifuka’. 330

Tongan people were reminded of Taufa‘āhau’s success in uniting Tonga into one kingdom and this was seen as a positive testament toward the adoption of Christian beliefs by the united Tongan Kingdom. The King led his people in adopting Christian commandments and conversion away from their traditional beliefs. As Finau Pila Ahio explained:

King George was anxious, not only to spread Christianity in Tonga, but to introduce the best from the outside world, provided these things were adapted to his country … he gave great attention to … the rule of law in a Christian society. Tonga’s political stability depended upon this. 331

Today, Tonga is heavily influenced by Christianity, with church activities taking much of Sunday on any given week and even the airport is closed to local or international flights. The King attends church services as do most members of the royal family, and Tongan people continue to associate Christianity with the monarchy.

**Tonga: Expanding or shrinking?**

Sione Lātūkefu states, ‘As the world is shrinking, Tongan culture will share more in common with other cultures, particularly those of Oceania with which they already have a lot in common’. 332 This argument actually makes us look at the world population


331 Ibid., p. 68.

growth in a different way. Indeed, while the population of the world is growing, by
default the space on the earth that is available to inhabit is lessening, and therefore the
distance between people is actually shrinking. The development of, and increased
access to, the internet and social media is breaking down traditional geographical
barriers. So too is the increase in transport available at increasingly low prices. As such,
an important ancillary argument to consider is that Tonga is not shrinking, the world is.
And as the world shrinks, Tonga is actually expanding. This concept echoes ‘Our Sea of
Islands’, where Epeli Hau'ofa writes of an expanding Oceania,\(^{333}\) one where the people
(continue to) move and connect across oceans and borders, and its expansion is proof
that Tonga is not ‘too small, too poor and too isolated’ to undertake ‘the contemporary
process of what may be called “world enlargement” carried out by tens of thousands of
ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean from east to west and north to south’.\(^{334}\)

**Being Tongan outside of Tonga**

Reflecting on the many quotes, questions and observations made in my fieldwork notes,
I was, on some points, at odds with a number of my interlocutors as to whether Tonga
was expanding in the world today. It seemed to me that the things I had observed at the
fundraiser night at the Albert Hall in Canberra, and indeed at other similar events in
Auckland, Sydney and Brisbane, were clearly showing that the Tongan culture and
language was alive and vibrant in other parts of the world, beyond the islands of Tonga
itself. To me, this was an argument about Tonga growing and spreading to new places
and new peoples. But this was not how at least two of my interlocutors felt. Ana said
that Tonga was becoming a smaller country in a world that is growing bigger every day,
‘Tonga’s population is just not growing fast enough compared with other countries, like

\(^{333}\) Hau'ofa, ‘Our sea of islands’.

\(^{334}\) Ibid.
China’, while Sione said that he felt ‘the Tongan culture is being swallowed up by other cultures and Tongans are wanting to be everything else other than Tongan, especially the ones who move overseas’. I could not disagree with the valid perspectives of these two interlocutors, especially given my commitment that my research would both acknowledge and empower Tongan perspectives wherever possible. However, in looking at my interviews as a whole, it appears that, of the Tongan people I spoke to, most were of the view that the Tongan kinship system, as a direct result of transnationalism and globalisation, was expanding.

Many Tongans living abroad were born away from Tonga, and yet still identify as Tongan. With a population of around 107,000 in Tonga, there are now more Tongans living outside of Tonga than in the homeland (based on the World Health Organisation’s estimate of 110,000 between Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and the United States alone). Some of these people may not have been taught to speak the Tongan language, or to understand the meaning behind Tongan names, customs and other cultural practices, but that does not necessarily mean they feel any less Tongan than those who do, and I would argue that it does not mean they are any less Tongan either. As has been discussed throughout this thesis, the entire social order in Tonga is governed by kinship relations. Tongans are taught to know who their immediate relations are, and what islands or villages they belong to. Knowing one’s genealogy is something Tongans pride

335 Note. China has population growth the size of Tonga’s entire population every week!

336 Interview with Sione (pseudonym), 10 July 2012.


338 Interview with Sione (pseudonym), 10 July 2012.

339 Ibid.
themselves on, and on many occasions during my field work I was struck by the considerable detail people knew of how they, and even extended family members, were related to people from other villages, towns and islands. As such, kinship frames Tongan social organisation and Tongan transnationalism. It is in maintaining the relationships with kin based in the ‘motherland’ that Tongans living abroad bring about an active transnationalism. Tongan kinship is deeply shaped by ideas of obligation and reciprocity.

My Tongan interlocutors suggested that, increasingly, second and third generation Tongans living abroad may not have the same commitment to kinship. This is challenging the ideas of what it means to be Tongan and a Tongan living outside of Tonga as previously discussed in the literature. Ana explained:

To be a Tongan nowadays, you don’t have to live in Tonga and you don’t even have to be born here. I have relatives in New Zealand who have never been to Tonga and they still proudly identify as Tongans even though they don’t speak the language. [‘And what do you think about that?’ I asked her] Well, Tonga today is different to Tonga yesterday. Who am I to decide what is a Tongan? We are everywhere now – all around the world.

This quote from Ana almost mirrors the words of Steve Tupai Francis explaining the transnational experience of many Pacific Islanders today when he states that those


341 Ibid.


343 Interview with Ana, December 2012.
living in diasporic communities need never return to their homeland in order to
legitimately participate ... In fact, transnational actors do not need to have been born in
the ‘homeland’ to identify strongly with the country of origin of their parents or
grandparents, and to participate in diasporic transactions.\textsuperscript{344}

What connects Tongans to Tonga, is blood, through kinship, which ultimately connects
them to land. As another of my interlocutors, Steven Sisifa, explains, Tongan identity is
not lost when a Tongan is born, raised or living in another country:

I do consider myself very much Australian and Tongan. But I wouldn’t say I feel … I
identify more so as one or the other. So consider it this way, I would identify myself as
whatever depending on which room I’m in at the time.\textsuperscript{345}

What is clear, is that Tonga as a nation is very different today to the Tonga prior
to the ascension to the throne of Tupou V. To be ‘Tongan’ today, one does not have to
live in Tonga and, indeed, one does not even have to have been born there. A wonderful
eexample of a Tongan person being Tongan away from Tonga, was that of Dr Tēvita O.
Ka’ili, a Facebook friend of mine whom I met while in Hawai’i attending the ANU
Pacific Islands Field School. It was during the 2016 visit of King Tupou VI and Queen
Nanasipau’u for the grand opening of the new Tongan village at the Polynesian Cultural
Centre that Dr Ka’ili posted on Facebook:

I am wearing a ta’ovala (a ritual waist mat) as a sign of respect for the mana (power)
and tapu (sacredness) of the King and Queen of Tonga, who are direct descendants of
the Oceanic god Tangaloa. A ta’ovala is a metonym for the fonua, land and its people.

\textsuperscript{344} Steve Tupai Francis, ‘The view from “home” – transnational movements from three Tongan villages’,
in \textit{Migration and Transnationalism Pacific Perspectives}, edited by Helen Lee & Steve Tupai Francis,
(accessed 4 July 2018).

\textsuperscript{345} Interview with Steven Sisifa, no. 1, 18 November 2014.
Wearing the taʻovala is a Tongan ritual act of wrapping the fonua around one’s body. It signifies the way the fonua (land and its people, environment, placenta) encircles and nourishes a person. It is also a reminder of one’s symbiotic relationship with the fonua. Typically, a taʻovala is woven from the natural elements (pandanus, fau, kuta plants) of the fonua. It is a microcosm of the fonua. Tongan legends say that the first taʻovala came from the lā (woven mat sail) of a kalia, an ancient double-hulled canoe. Thus, the taʻovala links the wearer to both land and sea [Figure 38].

![Figure 38. Dr Tēvita O. Kaʻili (centre) wearing a taʻovala](image)

Source. Photographed by Norman Harris. Photo taken from Tēvita O. Kaiʻili’s Facebook page, 14 June 2016. Used with permission

Although Tongan people are very aware that being away from Tonga does not take away their ‘Tonganess’, I did note a common theme that was articulated to me by several Tongan interlocutors in the diaspora; that they are facing increasing challenges in maintaining their Tongan identity when they are away from Tonga. One of my interlocutors, Seini, explained that

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346 Tēvita O. Kaiʻili’s Facebook page, 14 June 2016.
in New Zealand, it is easier for us because there are already many Tongans here. Also, New Zealand is the land of your people, the Māoris [sic]. We do have some things in common but also we have some different ways of doing things. But when I lived in the US it was really hard because there weren’t many Tongans and also we had to fit into a palangi world.347

Figure 39. New Zealand Government Ministers of Māori and Pasifika descent. Pictured wearing her ta’ovala is Jenny Salesa, a New Zealand Cabinet Minister of Tongan heritage Source. Atawhai Tibble, LinkedIn page, October 2017.

I personally have been honoured to witness the experience of many of my Tongan friends and family ‘being Tongan’ outside of Tonga, and will use the example of fakapale to show how Tongan people are able to keep their culture and connections alive outside of Tonga through this practice. Fakapale is the practice of placing money

347 Interview with Seini (pseudonym), March 2014.
on a dancer, or dancers, performing a Tongan dance at the event and might be translated as ‘to give a prize to’ or ‘to reward’. *Fakapale* is described as the ‘prize money’ and often given generously when the dancer is performing at a fundraiser, or if the occasion is a particularly significant one where, for example, the dancer is performing at a wedding. The Tongan tradition of *fakapale* is one usually seen at birthdays, weddings and other significant celebrations.

Natsuko Higa describes this unique Tongan practice of giving through dance not only as an art, but also economic activity.

Giving is more than the transference of objects from one person to another; it is also a dynamic and performative process embodied by participants. *Fakapale* is culturally significant as a type of nonverbal communication accomplished mainly through bodily movement.348

While attending the wedding of the Honourable Virginia Tuita to Lopeti Aleamotu’a in Auckland in December 2015, I noticed that a number of people were practising *fakapale*. The person seated near me, who was *palangi*, asked me whether or not I wanted to go up with her to place money on one of the dancers. I declined because I did not know the dancers. A Tongan woman who I knew lived in Auckland who was seated with us leaned across and said to me that I need not worry about that because in honouring the dancer, no matter who the dancer was, I was also honouring the couple whose marriage we were all gathered to celebrate. Her advice was valuable to me and has come to mind on a number of occasions since that wedding.

**From surfing the Pacific Ocean to surfing the internet**

One of the challenges I have faced in undertaking research for this thesis has been trying to navigate the breadth of Tongan perspectives across the different strata or

classes, as well as people based both in Tonga and the Tongan diaspora. For much of the previous century, differences based in rank and genealogy, along with age-based social customs, were the most crucial categories people considered when engaging with each other in Tonga (or in the diaspora). But now, other dimensions such as gender, religious affiliation, and level of education are becoming increasingly relevant, especially in an expanding diaspora where rank is less focal than it is in Tonga itself. Tonga’s complex kinship webs go some way towards explaining the complexity of Tongan interactions on the World Wide Web. One space where Tongan social rank is both highlighted, and often collapsed, is on social media, particularly Facebook, which is the online social media forum most used by Tongans in this research.349

During my PhD research, I have connected to almost 200 Tongans via Facebook and a number have also engaged with me through tweets I have posted on Twitter about Tonga. I have had people send me videos, stories and photos in relation to my research on King George Tupou V and Tongan kingship—and these have come from all over the world—some from people I don’t know, and who don’t know me.

These exchanges on Facebook are much more than just keeping in touch with friends and members of one’s kainga (or extended family). There are Facebook pages about Tongan sports teams, Facebook groups dedicated to honouring the Late Kings and Queens of Tonga, numerous pages for different Tongan villages—which are used to communicate messages such as announcements of the passing of a local elder, to organising the shipping of gifts or food for a major event from one Island to another, or even to sharing photos of a funeral so that people who could not be there can feel as though they were.

349 Although it is impossible to determine how many Tongans use Facebook, it is estimated by Nikki Mariner (ANU) that around 40 per cent of Tongans in Tonga use Facebook.
It took me a while to get used to seeing photos of deceased people in their coffins, or even on their death beds in hospital, come up on my Facebook newsfeed because one of my Facebook friends had posted it or was tagged into it. Now this is a very Tongan thing—to tag oneself, or others in a photo, even if they are not in the photo or were not present on the day or at the event where the photo was taken. I think this goes back to my point about the World Wide Web. To Tongans it is not very wide at all; they use this cyber world as their own world, this web as their own kinship web. It is a web they use on a daily basis to make a range of important exchanges that strengthen social kinship ties.

My friend Sia said to me,

I have been to so many funerals in Tonga by logging in to Facebook. I can’t afford to go back all the time, but I can send some money and I can see these being presented in the photos. And I can see my relatives and I can see the coffin.350

Facebook, and the cyber space in general, is being traversed in the same way the Pacific Ocean has been for centuries but at a much faster pace and much more frequently.

There is ample research showing the significance of the internet in the lives of island communities all over Oceania (including by scholars such as Helen Lee and Steve Tupai Francis), and in Tonga this is very much the case. Tongans surf the internet in the same way their ancestors have been travelling across the Pacific Ocean.

Facebook’s reach is not just across geographical boundaries, it also stretches across the different strata of Tongan society. With such a large uptake of Facebook among Tongans, it is no surprise that members of the nobility are active online, and some members of the royal family too. It does surprise some people, however, that the late King George Tupou V was a user of Facebook, under the pseudonym ‘George Strelnitz’, which was the name of a long-deceased military soldier who the King had

350 Personal conversation with Sia, June 2014.
once studied (the King was very interested in military history). I was interested to review what was publicly available on the King’s Facebook page and could see that he had friends (both Tongan and non-Tongan), some of whom I knew, who would write to him. In the images below you can get a sense of some of these messages and the King’s humour and candidness, something often commended on by his friends and family interviewed for this thesis.

Figure 40. King George Tupou V’s Facebook page (‘George Strelnitz’) and selected comments
Source. Screenshots taken from the Late King’s Facebook page. Publicly available

While I have not undertaken intensive research on how and why Tongans use the internet, it has been a constant reality both in this research, and in my own lived experience as a Pacific Islander living in the diaspora, for me to engage with Tongan people and to observe Tongan interactions on social media, especially Facebook but also Twitter and Instagram. Facebook, Feisipuka, or Tohi’ata (a term developed by Burroughs and Ka’ili), is also a space where Tongans air their views on the royal family. There are

351 Revealed to me by the Late King’s friends, Angus and Jenny Rogers, February 2013.

many Facebook pages dedicated to the Tongan royal family, and there are general pages for Tongans to share photos, videos and messages about key Tongan events. One particularly popular Facebook group is the ‘I’m Proud To Be Tongan’ group which has over 17,000 members. This page is a fascinating space to observe because of the diverse range of topics discussed (sports events, arts and music, politics, major events, the royal family and even the sharing of Tongan recipes). Many people who post in the group use their own names for their Facebook profiles, but there are also a number of people who clearly choose to use pseudonyms when posting. This page shows Tonga’s diversity and expansion in a very clear way—people are able to challenge what it means to be Tongan in the twenty-first century, and to do so in a forum that is public and therefore able to be observed by anyone with any interest in Tonga.

An example of a particularly interesting post on the ‘I’m Proud To Be Tongan’ Facebook page was where the owner (i.e. the person who set up and manages the Facebook page) posted a photograph of Prince Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala and noble woman, Sinaitakala Fakafanua, with a caption below asking for people to share their thoughts:

![Image of Prince Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala and Sinaitakala Fakafanua](image)

**Figure 41.** ‘What are your thoughts on King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV’s two grandchildren Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala and Sinaitakala Fakafanua [note: they are actually second cousins] getting married in July?’

Source. ‘I’m Proud to be Tongan’ Facebook Page. Name of person who started the post has been withheld. The page is open to the public.
The caption was not entirely correct as these two are not both grandchildren of King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV, only Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala is. Sinaitakala is the granddaughter of Prince Fatafehi Tu‘ipelehake, who was the brother of King Tāufa’āhau Tupou IV, meaning their grandfathers were brothers. But many of the comments made on the Facebook page by Tongan people, with a variety of opinions expressed, suggest that some people have strong, but varying, views about the monarchy and Tongan culture. A selection of these comments have been de-identified (and translated from the online ‘Internet Pidgin’ where necessary) below:

**Facebook User 1.** I fort that royal family in Tongan tradition married a samoan?lol..or am I botsing it..to be HONEST ive seen worst couples..lol..maybe it’s a strategy to keep the royal blood between themselves and stop other familyys from becoming noble? or titled?lol..#jstsaying..lol

(I thought that the royal family in Tongan tradition married a Samoan? Laughing out loud. Or am I botching it … to be HONEST I’ve seen worse couples … laughing out loud … maybe it’s a strategy to keep the royal blood between themselves and stop other families from becoming noble or titled? Laughing out loud. Just Saying. Laughing out loud)

**Facebook User 2.** my nena told me da reason y they dont marry outsider (you and me) its cause the of there royal blood they have to keep it going cause dats wats make thm royal .. its been like that for ages

(My Nana told me the reason why they don’t marry outsiders (you and me) is because of their royal blood, they have to keep it going because that’s what makes them royal. It’s been like that for ages.)

**Facebook User 3.** What a Pretty Young Lady.... Sad to see that she can’t choose her own Destiny. Makes me so very thankful for My Freedom.
Facebook User 4. Well fumm mii opinion.. n wat ï learnt bout da royal family wen ï stayd dea

is dat dey keep it in da family.. it might seem taboo to da outside world or to other tonganz dat
dnt understand but itz been goin on fo decadez since da first King of tonga.. da reason being is
dat if a royal marry outside da family he/she wouldnt be consider royal anymore.. itz not forced
itz up to dem weather dey want to or nott.. if not den dey can choose to stay single or marry
outside n lose dat royal title.. it is a part of our culture n people need to learn more den jus sayn
dat itz nasty or wat not.. but it doesnt mean dat all tonganz r like dat itz jus da royal family!!!
(Well from my opinion and what I learned about the royal family when I stayed there is that
they keep it in the family … It might seem taboo to the outside world or to other Tongans that
don’t understand but it’s been going on for decades since the first King of Tonga … The reason
being is that if a royal marries outside the family, he/she wouldn’t be considered royal anymore.
It’s not forced, it’s up to them whether they want to or not. If not then they can choose to stay
single, or marry outside and lose that royal title. It is a part of our culture and people need to
learn more than just saying that it's ‘nasty’ or what not … but it doesn’t mean that all Tongans
are like that it’s just the royal family!

Facebook User 4. By da way readn all dis comment is jus pure rudee.. first off we dnt have a
government.. we r da only island dat isnt rule by any government.. n second dis has nothin to do
wit fkapaapa.. fkapaapa is respect.. respect ur family n people around u.. respect ur culture n
respect ur people.. dey respect dea culture soo dey choose to go threw dat path.. n third if ur
proud to be tongan den u should be proud of our culture including da way our royal family
workz.. if not den ur confused n dnt noe anythin bout our culture n how thingz work.. instead of
criticizing our royal family maybe u should take da time to learn our culture n everythin dat a
tongan should noe..

(By the way reading all these comments, it’s just pure rude! First off, we don’t have a
government: we are the only island that isn’t ruled by any government. And second, this has
nothing to do with faka’apa’apa … faka’apa’apa is respect … respect your family and people
around you … respect your culture and respect your people. They respect their culture so they choose to go through that path. Third, if you’re proud to be Tongan then you should be proud of our culture including the way our royal family works. If not, then you’re confused and don’t know anything about our culture and how things work. Instead of criticising our royal family, maybe you should take the time to learn our culture and everything that a Tongan should know…

**Facebook User 5.** Yuck! 4th cousins marrying freak me out. If the royals from England can marry ‘common’ people surely there are enough Tongans out there who are not related to marry!

(Yuck! Fourth cousins marrying freaks me out. If the royals from England can marry ‘common’ people, surely there are enough Tongans out there, who are not related, to marry!)

**Facebook User 6.** It’s been that way for ages its too keep there bloodline pure guys why do you think they’re all the same my bro has study there whole family tree most of them got cut just for marrying outside and as for our former King tupou VI he rejected the plan of getting marryed to his own kuz. Sickening muj but the only thing in the past they were royals koz there were the wealthiest in Tonga. Oooh wow. Agree with [another Facebook User]. NEXXT!!!

(It’s been that way for ages. It’s to keep their bloodline pure, guys, why do you think they’re all the same? My brother has studied their whole family tree. Most of them got cut, just for marrying outside. And as for our former King, Tupou VI [sic], he rejected the plan of getting married to his own cousin. Sickening much, but the only thing in the past they were royals because they were the wealthiest in Tonga. Ooh wow. Agree with [another Facebook User].

Next!

**Facebook User 8.** Royal or not it’s wrong..would your cousin???there is no 1st,2nd,3rd etc...family is family & a cousin is a cousin & just like a sister or brother,would you marry your brother or sister, the English royal family are the highest royals in the world & they don't marry blood..
(Royal or not, it’s just wrong … would you marry your cousin? There is no 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc. … family is family, and a cousin is a cousin. Just like a sister or brother. Would you marry your brother or sister? The English royal family are the highest royals in the world and they don’t marry blood…

**Facebook User 8.** Biblically it’s not forbidden.

**Facebook User 9.** when you have full comprehension of our Royal Family history. It is unfair for us to criticise these two Young People as they have Roles and Responsibilities which are unbeknown to you and I as we do not hold their status. I wish them Love and Joy for their upcoming Union.

(When you have full comprehension of our royal family history … it is unfair for us to criticise these two young people as they have roles and responsibilities which are unbeknown to you and I, as we do not hold their status. I wish them love and joy for their upcoming union.)

**Facebook User 10.** None of my business

These views demonstrate a variety of perspectives on Tongan culture and the monarchy, but also the power of social media in giving Tongans a forum on which to share such views, something that would be much more difficult in everyday, embodied Tongan conversations and not without ramifications if heard in certain contexts. In my observations in the online environment, many Tongans tend to be very loyal to the monarchy and will not hesitate to publicly stand up for them against criticism by other Tongans. Some were quite critical, but some also very respectful and loyal. What this particular Facebook discussion has highlighted is that the Facebook space is one where people are able to more freely express their views about Tongan kinship relations and about Tongan kingship.

When I showed this Facebook discussion to a friend who is Tongan, she said she was not
surprised to see this because Facebook has taken away the taboo of certain topics and, rightly or wrongly, it was becoming a space where people felt more equal.

**Tongans as Tonga**

Tonga has been expanding for many hundreds of years and the Tongan diaspora continues to expand and evolve. I recall a conversation with Frederica Filipe where she said, and I paraphrase here:

> You know how they say something like ‘You can take the Tongan out of Tonga, but you can’t take the Tonga out of the Tongan’. Well, the first part of that is not correct. You can never take the Tongan out of Tonga. Wherever they are in the world, even if they weren’t born in Tonga – they are in Tonga by the fact they have Tongan blood which is connected to the people and the land that make up Tonga. They are Tongan, yes, but they are also Tonga.\(^{353}\)

Today, the King is not just King of 100,000 or so Tongans in the Tongan islands, but also of about as many people who are Tongan living in the diaspora—in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and the United States. But the King is not King first. First he is a Tongan, his blood, his connection to the land of Tonga, they are first. His kinship connections are first. Anyone who thinks it is kingship that governs Tonga, is wrong. Tonga is governed by kinship, and kinship relations are fundamentally what underpins the order in Tongan society.

Across the world, Tongans living in many far-flung places continue to identify as Tongan subjects. Their Tongan-ness keeps them connected to ‘their’ King. And he has little choice, for his role as kin is first, and as King, is second. Tonga’s monarchy is a very globally connected one. Princess Angelika and more recently Crown Prince Tupouto‘a ‘Ulukalala and his family are based in Canberra, Australia, while other

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\(^{353}\)Conversation with Frederica Filipe, December 2012.
members of the royal family are based in Auckland, and some in the United States. Most of this generation of royals were born in Aotearoa New Zealand rather than in Tonga itself (indeed, all three of the King’s children were, granting them dual citizenship), following on from the King’s generation where most were educated abroad in Aotearoa New Zealand and/or the United Kingdom.

The experience of Tongans living abroad comes back to kinship so often in the literature, as well as throughout transcripts of my research with Tongan people. Tēvita O. Ka‘ili speaks of an encounter with a Tongan woman whom he met at the market on the island of Maui. ‘When she asked where I was from in Tonga, I responded by giving her the names of my parents and grandparents and their respective islands in Tonga’.354 In many ways, it is the genealogical link—that is, the link through both genealogy and blood, and land—that matters most. Ka‘ili explains that (similarly to my own Māori culture, and that of other Oceanic peoples):

Fonua is an integral part of Tongan genealogy and sense of place. The link between land and people is embedded in the Tongan concept of fonua—land and its people. Fonua encompasses the spiritual and genealogical oneness of land and its people, and, at the same time, the reciprocal exchanges between them. Within this mutually beneficial reciprocal relationship, people take care of (tauhi) their land, and in return, the land nourishes its people [emphasis in original].355

Ka‘ili explains how the word fonua refers to both ‘land’ and ‘people’. He explains that in Tonga the mother’s ‘placenta’, ‘land [and its people]’ and one’s grave are all called fonua. That is, according to ‘Okusitino Mahina, ‘one is born out of a fonua


355 Ibid, p. 93.
into a fonua, who, upon death, enters another fonua. This is similar to my own Māori language and the word *whenua*, referring to the afterbirth as well as land. This is not a coincidence, rather, a literal representation of the Tongan, and more broadly, the Indigenous understanding, that as peoples we are from and of the land, while in fact being the land itself—that which we are born from and will return to. This link is not broken, regardless of how far we travel.

**Projecting kingship across oceans**

In the beginning stages of my research, I discounted the significance of the role of the King towards Tongans living in the diaspora. My initial view was that it was no different to Queen Elizabeth II, who has this role in many different countries. But the more people I interviewed the more it became clear that it was a very different context indeed. Queen Elizabeth II, for example, is the Queen in Australia and New Zealand because they are two countries where she is separately the constitutional head of state.

But her connection to Māori is one established by force (or partnership, depending on how one views the coming of the British to Aotearoa and the meaning and intent of the Treaty of Waitangi), not by *whakapapa* (genealogy) or kinship in the way the Tongan King connects to Tongan people, wherever they are in the world.

This fundamental difference, explained to me by the late Lord and now Dowager Lady Fusitu‘a, is that the Tongan King is first and foremost head of a kinship system that sees him connected by blood to all Tongan people, and, second, he is head of state. If tomorrow the King were to be removed from office as head of state, he would still be the head of the kinship system. Only if every single Tongan person on earth disappeared

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would he lose that role.\textsuperscript{357} It is in this distinction that one understands the importance of blood kinship to Tongan Kingship. No matter how removed a person is from the Royal bloodline, they are still connected, in some way, to this kinship system. Kaʻili speaks on the importance of understanding the Tongan notion of social space in order to understand Tongan transnational relations:

\begin{quote}
[T]he cultural value of tauhi vā, that is, caring for sociospatial relations is a core principle in understanding the uniqueness of Tongan transnationalism … Tongans generally view reciprocal exchange, whether within Tonga or transnationally, as a sociospatial practise, or tauhi vā – taking care of sociospatial relations with kin and kin-like members.\textsuperscript{358}
\end{quote}

**Conclusion**

Globalisation, while in some ways making Tonga smaller and more insignificant, is also spreading Tongan migrants and, as such, Tonga itself. Tongan peoples, wherever they live, are able to express their Tongan identity on social media and through continuing Tongan customs. The Tongan transnational ‘empire’ today is one that was established by kinship; a growing kinship system that has spread across the world. The thing that binds together Tonga’s transnational empire—indeed the most enduring thing that keeps the Tongan King at the head of a transnation—is kinship, and as outlined in this chapter, while Tonga is evolving, it is also expanding within a broader ‘expanding Oceania’.\textsuperscript{359}

\textsuperscript{357} Interview with Fusitua’a (senior), July 2012.

\textsuperscript{358} Kaʻili, ‘Tauhi vā’, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{359} Hauʻofa, ‘Our sea of islands’. 
Chapter Seven

From Tuʻi Rule to Tuʻa Government:
The Evolution of Tongan Polity

For a large part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Tonga’s political and constitutional history has been shaped by the Tuʻi, (or paramount rulers) of Tonga. As outlined in Chapter Three, those who are tuʻa (or commoners) have exercised little influence over their country’s political affairs. That is until recently, when Tonga became a fully functioning democracy with the first person of tuʻa status elected to the office of Prime Minister in late 2014.

This chapter will explore Tonga’s gradual evolution from aristocratic rule, to government by the people, and argue that despite the expansion of democracy in Tonga, the relevance and status of the monarchy is still very much entrenched because of its place within Tonga’s kinship system. I will start by setting the scene of Tonga’s constitutional birth in the era of Tupou I (1845–1893), acknowledging that for an entire century, Tonga experienced very little change in relation to its Constitution as developed by Tupou I and his advisors. I will then look at the tides of democracy that affected Tonga first in the late 1970s, and then more intensely in the mid-2000s, culminating in a tumultuous period for Tonga immediately after the death of King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV in 2006. The result of the political arrangements put in place during King George Tupou V’s reign were described to me by the then Opposition Leader of Tonga, Samiuela ʻAkilisi Pōhiva (usually referred to by his second name ʻAkilisi), as Tonga’s ‘New Political Order’. This new era of politics will be explored through the insights of my interlocutors, and in the process, I will consider the intricacies of democracy in Tonga’s kinship-oriented society.

360 Interview with Samiuela ʻAkilisi Pōhiva, 20 December 2012.
Recognising the role that the *Tu‘i* have played, and continue to play in the Tongan polity, this chapter outlines the key role played by the *Tu‘i Kanokupolu*, King George Tupou V, in Tonga’s most recent political reforms, unquestionably the most significant since the Constitution was promulgated in 1875. It will then discuss the challenges facing the current monarch, King Tupou VI, and outline the somewhat unusual history of how he, the youngest of the four children of King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV and Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho, went from the bottom of the ladder, to prime minister, and then to King. Finally, the historical significance of Tonga’s first commoner being elected prime minister, and to a lesser extent the appointment of its first commoner prime minister eight years earlier, will be explored before concluding with a reflection on the moment in 2010 when the 23rd *Tu‘i Kanokupolu* gave a momentous speech relinquishing numerous powers of the monarch and investing them in the elected government of the people. It is worth noting that some I have spoken with disagree about the extent to which Tonga’s Parliament is truly democratic; because while the Tongan Parliament is made up of a majority (seventeen out of twenty-six) of members who are ‘Peoples’ Representatives’, the other nine of the twenty-six members are ‘Nobles’ Representatives’, elected among the thirty-three Nobles of Tonga. Given the scope of this thesis and chapter, I do not outline this debate in detail. However I acknowledge here, that this is a significant topic that needs further exploration in its own right. I have chosen to focus here on the overwhelming view of my interlocutors, and existing literature on Tonga, that Tonga is by most measures, a true democracy that has become more democratic since the reforms of the 2000s.


362 Feleti Sevele assumed the office of prime minister on 30 March 2006.

363 A paramount Tongan title still actively held by the reigning monarch (see Chapter One).
The first ‘roadmap’ to constitutional government in Tonga

When the great chief Tāufa'āhau became paramount chief of all of Tonga in the mid-1800s, Tonga was in a state of unrest: ‘he did not inherit a quiet little island paradise … Tonga was boiling with internal factions and was being coveted by hungry colonial giants from the Northern Hemisphere’.\(^{364}\) Tāufa'āhau’s rise to power was indeed the result of many battles across all three of the main island groups of Tonga (Ha'apai, Vava'u and Tongatapu). Tāufa'āhau was established as the paramount chief of Ha'apai on the death of his father in 1820, and in taking on this title he also inherited a number of conflicts, each of which he went on to win.\(^{365}\) It is said that the ambitious Tāufa'āhau wanted to be more than chief of Ha'apai, and he looked to Vava'u to increase his influence in the late 1820s, taking on the paramount chiefly title of Vava'u in the early 1830s around the same time that he was baptised and took on the name George.\(^{366}\)

Tonga’s internal fighting had been a constant in Tupou I’s life; his skills in warfare and strategy would prove to be unparalleled.\(^{367}\) By the 1840s, then firmly the paramount chief of both Ha'apai and Vava'u, Tāufa'āhau looked to the biggest island, Tongatapu, to extend his reach. By 1845, after a series of raids on Tongatapu, Tāufa'āhau was widely regarded as the conquering chief and declared himself the first of the Tupou dynastical line, as King Siaosi (George) Tupou I.

Tupou I’s ability in gaining a powerful hold over the islands of Tonga is seen by many Tongans as a great achievement.\(^{368}\) But on his elevation to the position of the

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\(^{365}\) Sione Lātūkefu, King George Tupou I of Tonga, Nuku'alofa: Tonga Traditions Committee, 1975.

\(^{366}\) Ibid.

\(^{367}\) Ibid.

\(^{368}\) Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.
most prominent chief in Tonga, the work that lay before Tupou I was immense, because ‘he not only had to hold onto the power he had fought for, but bring unity to a very divided people’.\textsuperscript{369} His being the first to bring unity to a divided and warring people is, for many Tongans, the greatest achievement of any Tongan chief throughout Tonga’s history, and sits alongside the achievement of Kamehameha I, the Hawaiian chief who united the Hawaiian Archipelago as the Hawaiian Kingdom by 1810, beginning the Kamehameha dynasty which ruled Hawai‘i until the 1870s.\textsuperscript{370}

Just as Kamehameha I achieved his rule by working with a number of Western allies,\textsuperscript{371} a number of my interlocutors referred to Englishman the Reverend Shirley Baker, a Wesleyan missionary who arrived in Tonga in the early 1860s, as being central to supporting (or ‘influencing’, depending on the interlocutor) Tupou I to develop the Tongan constitution that was promulgated in 1875 which entailed the construction of a codified Tongan class system.\textsuperscript{372} While it is apparent in historical records that Reverend Baker played a key role in advising the King, it seems the ultimate credit must be given to Tupou I who himself explored every possible way to assert and protect his sovereignty, ensuring Tonga’s system of government would be able to withstand eager foreign powers. As Guy Powles explained:

> He [Tupou I] believed it was necessary to gain the early international recognition of his sovereignty in the form of treaties with France, Germany, Great Britain and the USA, thereby forestalling any attempt to claim Tonga as a colony. A major underlying purpose of the constitution of Tonga of 1875 was to demonstrate to the world that Tonga possessed the

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{370} Stacy Kamehiro, \textit{The Arts of Kingship}, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009. DOI: 
\url{10.21313/hawaii/9780824832636.001.0001}.

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{372} Interviews with Falekava Kupu, June 2012; Semisi Taumpoepoepeau February 2013; Fakailoatonga Taumoefolau, July 2012.
institutions of government and political stability needed to govern itself in an acceptable fashion without outside interference.\textsuperscript{373}

According to Powles, the Constitution of Tonga was the culmination of decades of effort on the part of Tupou I to use the laws of a central authority as the means of establishing and maintaining government and implementing policies.\textsuperscript{374} In doing so, Tupou I also ensured that the Constitution incorporated certain cultural principles, such as the supremacy of the monarch, the senior status of Nobles and the existence of a commoner class, reflecting aspects of traditional Tongan notions of chiefly leadership, and British ideas of nobility of the period. Powles explains that by virtue of privileges accorded to the King and Nobles in the parliamentary process, law-making was entirely within their control.\textsuperscript{375} It was on a trip to Sydney, when Tupou I met a lawyer who introduced him to the Hawaiian Constitution\textsuperscript{376} that he found that the ‘Tongan approach to ultimate authority was well expressed in Hawai‘i under the leadership of King Kamehameha III in his constitution of 1852, and he adopted clauses from that source’.\textsuperscript{377}

Ian Campbell observes that the Constitution ‘which was for its time, liberal, democratic and balanced’,\textsuperscript{378} was designed to consolidate the unification of Tonga and


\textsuperscript{374} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{375} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{376} Hawai‘i’s first constitution Ke Kumukānāwai a me nā Kānāwai o ko Hawai‘i Pae ‘Āina was promulgated in 1840.

\textsuperscript{377} Powles, ‘The Tongan monarchy and the constitution’.

\textsuperscript{378} Ian Campbell, Tonga’s Way to Democracy, Christchurch: Herodotus Press, 2011.
to re-establish peace after decades of civil war and disorder.\textsuperscript{379} Tupou I ‘adopted laws [and a Constitution] that weakened the powers of the chiefs and nominally gave greater control of their lives and resources to the common people’.\textsuperscript{380} Although Tonga had previously had many different levels of chiefly status, it became apparent in the context of the Constitution that there would be only three distinct classes in Tonga: the King (and immediate members of the Royal Family), Nobles, and ‘the people’ (commoners).\textsuperscript{381} Significantly, the Constitution also prohibited slavery,\textsuperscript{382} a practice that previously prevailed in parts of Tonga and with its abolition changed social relations dramatically for some people. Interestingly this was around the same time as slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833. Powles states that the promulgation of Tupou I’s Constitution in 1875 was undoubtedly Tonga’s ‘greatest political reform’.\textsuperscript{383} The Tongan High Commissioner to Australia, Princess Angelika Tuku’aho, agreed that this was a remarkable achievement in that it created a socio-political structure that endured for so long, even against the threats of imperialism:

His vision for unity and strength for Tonga all those years ago, despite the many challenges he faced, made it possible for his descendants to keep Tonga from being overtaken by foreign powers.\textsuperscript{384}

By ensuring the Constitution’s rigour and legitimacy, Tupou I ensured he retained his powerful position, one stronger than that which he had inherited in 1845. He was able to rule Tonga within a constitutional government system—one with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{379} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{381} Constitution of Tonga, 1875.
  \item \textsuperscript{382} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{383} Powles, ‘The Tongan monarchy and the constitution: Political reform in a traditional context’.
  \item \textsuperscript{384} Personal communication with Princess Angelika Tuku’aho, May 2013.
\end{itemize}
institutions that would be well-recognised by Western powers travelling the Pacific—and not by a system wherein leadership and governance had been so strongly contested as in the past. In his late seventies, Tupou I focused his energy on building a sustainable government system for Tonga, which was both strong and resilient by the time of his death aged ninety-five or ninety-six\(^{385}\) in February 1893.\(^{386}\)

**Treaty with the British Crown: The period of the protectorate**

In 1900 Tonga became a British Protectorate under a Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Tonga. This move was not because of any situation in Tonga, but rather because of broader imperial concerns. The British were well aware of the rise of other European powers across the Pacific and wanted to ensure that Tonga would remain an ally of theirs and not become another strategic platform in the Pacific for countries such as Germany or France. Then again, the British did not want to commit too much to the relationship given Tonga’s unified and strong government system. They felt they could meet their needs while keeping a very limited level of involvement (and, indeed, limited use of British resources for administrative purposes) in Tonga’s internal affairs.\(^{387}\)

Great Britain’s main concern in Tonga was to exclude the warships of foreign nations, for Tonga offered practically nothing worth exploiting from a nineteenth century European viewpoint, apart from its safe harbour at Vava‘u.\(^{388}\)

\(^{385}\) Records indicate Tupou I was born in 1797, but not what month he was born, which means it is unclear if he had yet reached 96 years when he died on 18 February 1893.

\(^{386}\) Campbell, *Tonga’s Way to Democracy*.


\(^{388}\) Ibid.
Penelope Lavaka (now Gregory), in her PhD thesis studying the relationship between Great Britain and Tonga in the early twentieth century, referred to the lines of a poem by Hamilton Hunter, the British Agent and Consul to Tonga from 1901 to 1909, as a ‘key-note for Britain’s attitude’ towards the Kingdom of Tonga: ‘By reason of its great / Its regal unimportance, it rests a native state’.

While there were other Pacific islands in a similar position at the time, namely the Cook Islands, Tokelau, Niue, the then British Solomon Islands, and Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Tonga’s immediate neighbour, Fiji, was a British colony (1874–1970), and Samoa was governed by the German Empire (1900–1914). Of all the island nations listed above, Tonga alone escaped becoming a colony of a European power, something I have highlighted is a matter of great pride to Tongans. The reality is, however, while a British Protectorate was not a colony of Britain, and thus not completely governed by the British Crown, in being afforded the protection of the British Crown, the British (through the British Agent) were able to heavily influence Tongan leadership. This ‘influence’ occurred a number of times during the Protectorate period. Lavaka describes how the British,

through the Western Pacific High Commission, intervened increasingly in Tonga’s internal affairs. Both the High Commissioner and the Vice-Consul took considerable interest in Tongan affairs … a history of what the Acting High Commissioner Sir William MacGregor, called ‘meddling interference with Tongan politics’ on the part of certain Vice-Consuls. Tupou I’s Government … began to fear that British annexation was imminent. On a number of occasions the High Commissioner used gunboats to reinforce his position in Tonga – in 1884, for example, HMS Espiegle visited Tonga to urge the release of the men convicted for

389 Ibid.
treason … The most notable intervention was Sir John Thurston’s deportation of the Tongan Premier, Baker, in July 1890. Thurston’s action, together with the secondment of Basil Thomson to Tonga for a year as Deputy Premier, stamped British influence indelibly on the Tongan Government and fostered the impression that Tonga was virtually a British Protectorate. 392

Tonga’s unique version of democracy

It was not until the late 1970s (or early 1980s according to Campbell), more than a hundred years after Tonga’s Constitution was promulgated, that the people of Tonga started to call for a more modern and democratic political system. A pro-democracy movement grew out of dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of equality in a political system that was entirely controlled by the nobility and royals. But exactly what level, or style, of democracy the proponents wanted was the subject of much debate and tension, including amongst themselves. There is a depth of material, particularly by Powles and Campbell, on Tonga’s recent constitutional reform and political history in which I situate my own research. Many of my interlocutors spoke in detail about democracy and of their feelings towards it in the interviews I conducted, although only those who were directly involved in matters of state tended to express views on broader constitutional and political reform in Tonga. Given these reforms have been written extensively about by both Powles and Campbell, this thesis does not outline the

393 Interview with Samiuela ‘Akilisi Pōhiva, December 2012.
394 Ian Campbell, Tonga’s Way to Democracy, p. 17.
396 Please note that one of my interview questions was specifically related to Tonga’s recent democratic reforms.
detail of these here. Instead, my key contribution to the literature is in reviewing the relationship between kinship, kingship and democracy in light of the reforms of 2010.

Many of the people involved in the pro-democracy movement were of the view that it was time for the increasingly well-educated middle class to have a say over their affairs because it was often the case that the elected and appointed nobles, many of whom were cabinet ministers making significant decisions that affected all Tongans, were not very well educated themselves. There was also a view amongst some pro-democracy leaders, which included a number of Church ministers, that all people were equal under God and, therefore, the elite minority should not have so much influence over the majority. Whatever the various reasons were in favour of a more democratic Tonga, there was a growing movement and, in 1992, a constitutional convention was hosted by Church leaders in Tonga to, essentially, discuss what the future role of the monarchy might be.\textsuperscript{397}

Only eight years ago the Tongan King held so much power that the government was, in effect, simply an extension of himself. In 2010, the King appointed the prime minister and ministers (almost all being Nobles), and the parliament was all but a ‘rubber stamp’ with minimal opportunities for the elected Peoples’ Representatives to influence decision making. From 1962 to 2010, there were nine Nobles’ Representative seats in the Parliament, and nine Peoples’ Representative seats although, unlike Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand for example, none of the elected members served in the Cabinet, which was entirely made up of appointees of the King.\textsuperscript{398} It was not until 2004, that King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV announced that four of the elected representatives would be chosen by him to serve as Cabinet ministers, although they would then have to


\textsuperscript{398} Powles, ‘The Tongan monarchy and the constitution’.

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give up their seats in the Parliament.\textsuperscript{399} This move was seen as a small but important step by the then King towards recognising that elected voices should be given more decision-making power in government.\textsuperscript{400} But it was the reforms under King George Tupou V where the power of the democratically elected representatives were given the loudest and most articulate voice in Tonga’s history. In August 2008, only days before his coronation, King George Tupou V announced that he would eventually relinquish significant amounts of his power and that he would be guided by the advice of the elected Prime Minister. This decision was enacted constitutionally in 2010 and an election immediately followed.

By 2011 these political reforms had been fully instituted meaning the government was elected by a much more representative parliament, with the King no longer appointing the prime minister and cabinet, instead leaving that to the elected representatives. For many, Tonga had thus become a true ‘democracy’. But in an interview with me ‘Akilisi Pōhiva said that ‘full democracy’ would only come about when the people, rather than the Nobles, were able to elect the Nobles’ Representatives who served in parliament.\textsuperscript{401} This position was shared by one public servant I interviewed, Tēvita,\textsuperscript{402} who argued that until the Nobles are accountable to the wider Tongan community, it was incorrect to say that Tonga was a ‘true’ democracy.

I feel like it is important for there to be Nobles represented given Tonga’s heritage and our social structures, and the role Nobles play in land governance, but I think the people should elect who the Noble reps are.\textsuperscript{403}

\textsuperscript{399} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{400} Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.

\textsuperscript{401} Interview with Samiuela ‘Akilisi Pōhiva, December 2012.

\textsuperscript{402} Tevita is a pseudonym used in agreement with this interlocutor. Interview took place on 19 December 2012.

\textsuperscript{403} Interview with Tevita, December 2012.
I did not encounter any Tongan who thought the Nobles should not have specific representation in the Legislative Assembly, although some argued there should be less than the current nine (out of twenty-six members), given these nine were representative of only thirty-three individuals. 404

Democracy in a kinship-oriented society

In commencing my research for this thesis my assumption was that democracy works better in smaller states because of the likelihood that the people/voters were more closely connected (to each other and to their political candidates), and that furthermore political candidates would be able to communicate directly with them. A number of political scientists have also argued that ‘smallness creates a more politically active and democratically minded citizenry’ 405 pointing to the writings of Enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu to support this idea. 406 In many ways it is obvious that in an intimately connected country like Tonga, the vast majority of the people know if, and how, they are related to political candidates. Steven Ratuva states that kinship is a powerful centripetal force in many Pacific Islands that have intimate kinship networks.

Because many politicians have localised interests, kinship is a means by which they can access the community ... This is where the dilemma between kinship responsibility and public accountability becomes obvious. For the politician, using public money to satisfy his or her kinspeople’s wishes could be labelled ‘corruption’; on the other hand, being seen not to be giving generously to his or her people would be political suicide … In Melanesia, the

404 That is, the thirty-three Noble title holders, which in practice can vary in numbers of actual people depending on whether some Nobles hold more than one title at a time.


406 Ibid.
The notion of *wantok* represents kinship existing at different levels ... For political parties in Melanesia, the use of kinship provides the easiest, cheapest and most effective way of mobilisation, extending influence and winning legitimacy ... Over the years, many political parties in Fiji had developed extensive links and networks based on kinship.\(^{407}\)

It is also likely that voters in Tonga know a great deal more about their local candidates’ personal lives and family than, say, the average voter in a typical regional or urban Australian electorate, and so the average Tongan voter is likely to have a much better idea of the type of person they are voting for than someone in a much larger political system. While this situation is not unique to Tonga, it does play out in different ways. For example, a New Zealand friend of mine who was in Tonga during the 2010 election mentioned that he was ‘amazed’ at how everyone seemed to know each other at the political gatherings and meetings he was observing. ‘It was like Tonga was one big community village’, he said to me.\(^{408}\) In many ways that is a fair observation and in that year’s election in Tonga the voter engagement would support the idea that a smaller country is likely to be more engaged in the election process; Tonga’s voter turnout was 90 per cent,\(^{409}\) a very high voter turnout for a country where voting is not compulsory. In comparison, in neighbouring Aotearoa New Zealand voter turnout for their general election in 2011 was 74.2 per cent,\(^{410}\) in the larger United Kingdom’s 2010 general

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\(^{408}\) Personal conversation between a friend and the author, December 2015.


election voter turnout was 65.1 per cent,\(^{411}\) and in the much larger United States presidential election in 2012 voter turnout was only 57.5 per cent.\(^{412}\)

Given that smaller states tend to have better voter turnout than larger ones (Australia also has around 90 per cent voter turnout on average, but unlike those listed above, Australia has made voting compulsory),\(^{413}\) it would seem fair to conclude that in smaller states democracy works better. But this is not necessarily the case. A number of arguments both for and against democracy in Tonga were put to me during interviews, although, as earlier mentioned, most interlocutors supported democracy in some shape or form. Even those I spoke to who were members of the royal family were in favour of Tonga’s recent democratic reforms. Interestingly, the strongest argument against democracy came from two people who were not part of the Tongan nobility or royalty. One, a high school teacher, said she did not feel Tonga was suited to democracy because people do not yet understand what it means to vote for someone who you believe will represent your interests and instead they vote for their family, or whoever their family members know the best.\(^{414}\)

And while that particular comment is not opposed to democracy per se, she went on to say that


\(^{414}\) Interview with Ana, December 2012.
Tonga is such a small place that even if the people get used to democracy, it’s never really going to be democratic as it will be the same families in power and a sense of allegiance to them that means people feel like they have no choice but to vote for them.\textsuperscript{415} 

Another person I spoke to had a much stronger view against democracy. Maata,\textsuperscript{416} an elderly Tongan woman now living in Aotearoa New Zealand, said that democracy was not the answer because Tongans operate better in the ‘traditional system of the King and Nobles working directly for the people’\textsuperscript{417}.

You have to look back in the early days when there was plenty of food, plenty of roles for people, and everyone knew their position. Now in Tonga there is no jobs, people are hungry and struggling, and you have no idea where you fit in the society. It used to be that the village had chiefs who had obligations to the villagers. And likewise the villagers have obligations to the chiefs. In this system, nobody went without. This is why democracy is not the answer – it’s not the answer for Tonga – because it is not bringing a better life for Tongans. How can anyone say otherwise? Show me how Tongans are better off because of democracy?\textsuperscript{418}

When I asked what in particular it was about the broader political system changing that has impacted so negatively on Tongans, she replied,

Democracy puts people in power who can get votes. But it does not teach those in power how to look after their people, something that our traditional system did. There was a real system of sharing, and you knew your obligations to your family and your village. It’s like

\textsuperscript{415} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{416} The pseudonym Maata is used at my suggestion because of the nature of comments made. ‘Maata’ was initially happy to have her own name used but when I showed her these comments in print she decided to go with my suggestion.

\textsuperscript{417} Interview with Maata, August 2014.

\textsuperscript{418} Ibid.
those in power were there because of what they do, not because of what they say to get the votes. That was the system that worked best for Tonga. Not today’s voting to get nothing.\footnote{Ibid.}

There was also an argument put forward by Wouter Veenendaal, also supported by Stephanie Lawson and Peter Lamour, that

due to the lack of political anonymity and the greater importance of kinship and personal relations in small polities … there is a greater tendency to various forms of … clientelism, patronage, and nepotism.\footnote{Veenendaal, ‘A big prince in a tiny realm’, p. 335. See also Stephanie Lawson, \textit{Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific}, Cambridge: University Press, 1996; Peter Lamour, \textit{Interpreting Corruption: Culture and Politics in the Pacific Islands}. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012.}

An observation from Ana supported this:

[Since] we know most of the candidates it is probably much easier for us to be blinded by our knowledge of a candidate than what they actually stand for. And also it is so easy for candidates to make promises to their family and friends but can they keep them?\footnote{Interview with Ana, December 2012.}

\textbf{‘Unity of power’}

While a number of specific changes were made to the Tongan Constitution in 2010, the core result of the reforms was that executive power would now be shared by the elected prime minister and ministers, and the Monarch, who retained a number of listed powers in the Constitution.\footnote{Powles, ‘The Tongan monarchy and the constitution’.}

In some background notes written by Tupou V in 2011, shared with me by the Honorary Consul-General for Tonga to Hamburg, Germany, Erwin M Ludewig,\footnote{Notes written by the King for his advisors and close friends.} the late King gives some background to Tonga’s then recent political reforms. In an email
to Ludewig he states, ‘I have tried to show the changes in their historical context without necessarily blaming anyone. At least there is nobody who can claim the credit for the entire event’.\textsuperscript{424} Tupou V clearly believed that the reforms that came about in 2010 were to ‘preserve the indivisibility of the Crown and promote the principle of the unity of power’\textsuperscript{425} ‘Unity of power’ refers here to what former Prime Minister Feleti Sevele describes as the ‘sharing of the load’ between King, the cabinet and the parliament, which was ‘only made possible, of course, by the King agreeing to it all’.\textsuperscript{426}

This approach to democracy in Tonga is not unique in that there is evidence to show that in other small monarchical states, such as Liechtenstein and Monaco, the power of the monarchy is so strong that democracy will only thrive with the support of the monarch, or at the very least it requires a monarch that is willing to accept and coexist alongside democracy.\textsuperscript{427}

Small states tend to be conservative. In many instances they have retained traditional forms of political representation (monarchy and chieftainship) either in their own right or alongside modern representative institutions.\textsuperscript{428}

**Relinquishing powers of the monarch – the King’s words**

The following words are the Address to the Nation by King George Tupou V given on Wednesday 24 November 2010:

\textsuperscript{424} Personal communication from King George Tupou V to Erwin M Ludewig, Tongan Consul-General to Hamburg, Germany, 28 February 2011.

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{426} Interview with Lord Feleti (Fred) Sevele, December 2012.


\textsuperscript{428} Ibid, p. 586.
In the year 1875, the King and his Nobles made a tryst with their God to govern the people according to the Constitution and the standards of civilisation of the day in order to maintain and promote peace and prosperity throughout the country.

The Constitution balanced the representation of the King (in Parliament) with that of the Nobility and the People but Executive power was permanently vested in the King and the Privy Council.

But the world has undergone great changes in the past 135 years and we have attained many advances which those Nobility would have scarce believed possible. It is an opportune time therefore to change the way we are ruled in order that our country could benefit from the talents and gifts which it has pleased the Almighty to grant to each of our people without favour whether they are born into the Upper or Lower Classes of society.

My duty is to be true to the promise made by those Noblemen in the past to rule the people with justice and mercy.

It was this duty which animated the submission of my Reforms of the Laws and Constitution to the Parliament and it undoubtedly motivated the House unanimously to accept them on 19th of July.

The number of Members representing the people shall be increased from 9 to 17 Members while the number representing the Nobility shall remain unchanged at 9.

The Parliament of 26 Members shall elect one of their number whom I shall appoint Prime Minister and he, in turn, shall choose no more than eleven (11) Ministers to form the Cabinet.

I shall grant my Executive Powers to the Cabinet and the Parliament and in future the Sovereign shall act only on the advice of His Prime Minister.

In accordance with the powers held by the Sovereign under the Constitution, I shall appoint the members of the Privy Council, the Judicial Law Committee of the Privy Council and the Lord Chancellor.
The Sovereign shall appoint all the Judges, Magistrates and the Attorney General but only on the recommendation of the Judicial Appointments and Disciplinary Panel. This body will be chaired by the Lord Chancellor and membership by the Law-Lords-in-Waiting of the Privy Council.

Other Judicial Powers held by the Sovereign under the Constitution may only be exercised on the advice of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

I have every confidence that the 25th. of November will be the greatest and most historic day for our Kingdom. You will choose your representatives to the Parliament and thus the first elected Government in our country’s long history.

At sunrise on Election Day you will feel the warmth of the sun as well as the gaze of your ancestors from the past and those of countless unborn generations in the future turn towards you. For a few brief moments in our meagre lives we shall occupy the attention of history itself and we will be judged on how we have kept its trust. It will be at this moment that our true character as a nation will show.

I send you all my Greetings.429

This speech suggests the King has a deep regard for the significance of the changes he is making, but the process that led to King George Tupou V relinquishing a range of the monarch’s powers has generated many differing perspectives. In the early stages of my research, I heard contesting views: some that he was forced to give up his powers or be overthrown, others that he was more than happy to bring about democracy in Tonga because it meant ridding himself of many menial tasks. What became apparent was that the end result was likely to have been somewhere between these polar opinions due to a range of factors. While it was clear that the King accepted that Tonga should

become a full democracy—indeed it seems he wanted this—there was still a need for an appropriate and palatable infrastructure to be put in place over a period of time to enable the Tongan people to be able to fully embrace it.

Ludewig recalled a conversation in the late 1980s with Tupou V, then the Crown Prince, about Tonga’s political future where the Crown Prince told Ludewig, ‘If I ever become King, I will call a general assembly which would be an avenue to modernise the Constitution’. Ludewig also recalls the Crown Prince asking many questions about the German government system as he sought to better understand other political systems in relation to Tonga. He also actively discussed the idea of Tonga possibly having two houses of parliament (an Upper House and a Lower House) but concluded that it would probably be ‘too much for Tonga’ given its size and the existence of an already established nobility. Years later, shortly after making the decision to relinquish some of his powers, Ludewig says that Tupou V reflected on his position, declaring ‘my father was a near-absolute monarch; I am a democratic King’. This was a comment similar to one attributed to Tupou V by Feleti (Fred) Sevele, former Prime Minister of Tonga, apparently made by the King at a private dinner only months before he died: ‘My father was born into captivity and he died in captivity. I was born into captivity, but will die a free man’. When I interviewed Sevele, he explained that Tupou V was not just happy that Tonga was democratic, but also relieved.

He had spent many years thinking a great deal about being monarch of a modern, democratic Tonga. The political reforms were very much his. He had been working on it for

430 Interview with Erwin M Ludewig, November 2012.

431 Ibid.

432 Ibid.

433 Interview with Lord Feleti (Fred) Sevele, December 2012.
many years. It was not the pro-democracy movement that achieved democracy, it was him [Tupou V].\textsuperscript{434}

Sevele revealed that during his time as prime minister, he and Tupou V had discussed a timetable for the political reforms well before the pro-democracy leaders were at the table.\textsuperscript{435} Sevele said that political reform was ‘his [Tupou V] greatest legacy’.\textsuperscript{436}

In a speech to the Tongan Parliament in 2011, Tupou V touched on the recent political reforms saying that they were of the highest priority and that economic and social changes would naturally follow and bring about the desired change to Tonga ‘from [being] an impoverished country which missed out on most opportunities to improve its circumstances in the 20th Century to a prosperous one of the 21st Century’.\textsuperscript{437} Whatever the role of Tupou V was in the move towards democracy, it is clear that like his ancestor, Tupou I, who in many ways developed the 1875 Constitution to ‘save’ Tonga from colonialism and associated ills, Tupou V had to make the necessary decisions to ensure Tonga could advance socially and economically in the twenty-first century. Tupou VI, the current King, younger brother to Tupou V, continues to function as part of Tonga’s democratic system under his brother’s reforms, and this provides an interesting view on the connection between kingship and kinship in modern Tonga.

\textsuperscript{434} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{435} I should note that Sevele was open about his own animosity towards Pohiva and members of the pro-democracy movement in our interview.

\textsuperscript{436} Ibid.

Monarchy and democracy: Not one or the other

At this point in this chapter, I refer to one particular monarch, Tupou VI, in demonstrating the concept that the monarchy and Tongan democracy can and do work side by side. As the youngest of the four children of King Taufaʻāhau Tupou VI and Queen Halaevalu Mataʻaho, Tupou VI, born Prince ‘Ahoʻeitu in 1959 never expected to be King. Five years younger than his brother closest in age (Prince Fatafehi Alaivahamamaʻo born in 1954), he was eleven years younger than his eldest brother (Prince Siaosi Tāufaʻāhau, later King George Tupou V), who was heir to the Tongan throne. In between the two older princes was born a royal daughter in 1951, Princess Sālote Mafieʻo Pilolevu, who as a female was behind her brothers in the Line of Succession, although as the eldest (indeed, only) daughter of King Tāufaʻāhau and Queen Halaevalu Mataʻaho, she exercised a higher personal blood rank relative to her younger brothers (as discussed in Chapter Three) even though they ranked ahead of her in the Line of Succession because of its primogeniture rule (see Table 9).438

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<tr>
<th>Queen Sālote Tupou III</th>
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<th>Prince Tungi</th>
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<td>King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prince Tāufaʻāhau (Later King George Tupou V)</td>
<td>Princess Pilolevu</td>
<td>Prince Fatafehi ‘Alaivahamamaʻo</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Prince ‘Ahoʻeitu (Later King Tupou VI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>no issue</td>
<td>4 daughters, 1 adopted son</td>
<td>2 sons, 1 daughter</td>
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Table 9. The children of King Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV and Queen Halaevalu Mataʻaho
Source. Developed by the author.

Prince Fatafehi ‘Alaivahamama‘o was second in line to the throne only up until 1980, when aged twenty-six, he was stripped of his royal title and place in the Line of Succession for marrying a commoner woman without his father’s consent, something required by law for any person likely to succeed to the throne.\footnote{Royal Proclamation, \textit{Tonga Gazette}, 07 November 1980.} In 1980, the eldest son, then the crown prince (later George Tupou V), while unmarried, was only in his early thirties and everyone expected that he would soon find a wife and have his own heir. Few people looked to the youngest prince (the current King), who was then twenty-one years old, as likely to one day be the monarch. However, one person I interviewed for this research explained that she knew back then (in 1980) that the young Prince ‘Aho‘eitu could in fact one day be King, because it was known by friends of the family that his eldest brother had no interest in marrying any of the available suitors of appropriate rank, and nobody expected that he would be allowed to marry a commoner (especially given that his father had just stripped his younger brother of his royal title for doing exactly that). As Ana stressed,

Some of us who were close to the Crown Prince knew he was destined to be a bachelor his whole life. Even though there were women coming and going in his life – not meaning in a rude way, but just that there was always lots of interest in him for obviously he was the crown prince after all – he never took a fancy to any of the ones who would actually be allowed to marry him … So I just never thought he would get married or have any children which means the younger brother would come after him to become King. I always thought that.\footnote{Interview with Ana, December 2012.}

By 2000, twenty years after his brother Prince Fatafehi ‘Alaivahamama‘o was stripped of his princely rank, at the age of fifty-two, the Crown Prince was still a
bachelor. Ana explained to me that as King Taufa‘āhau Tupou IV reached his eighties, his eldest son,

the one in line to the throne was the only child who was unmarried and without any legitimate children. This started to raise the ‘what if?’ question. ‘What if the Crown Prince never gets married and produces no heir?’ It was as if we all kept hope that he might get married someday, but eventually people started to accept that maybe it was not meant to be. He was in his fifties now and no sign of any suitable bride.441

A sad event struck the Tongan royal family in February 2004 when Prince Fatafehi ‘Alaivahamama‘o (then referred to by the noble title of Ma‘atu) died suddenly of a heart attack aged just forty-nine years. Ma‘atu had remarried to someone of high standing, Alaileula Poutasi Jungblut, from the Samoan chiefly family Malietoa. While this marriage was recognised by the King, as were their children, Ma‘atu was never reinstated into the Line of Succession, and therefore neither were his children. If it was only a presumption that Prince ‘Ahoeitu (now Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata, having been given these three noble titles by his father), would become the next heir to the throne, the death of his older brother only confirmed this. There was now no way Ma‘atu would be reinstated in the Line of Succession, which made his children ineligible to succeed. This meant that unless the Crown Prince (already in his late fifties) married and had a child, then Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata would be likely to succeed his older brother at some stage in the future to become King, acknowledging that his older brother was more than a decade older and not without health issues.

Upon his death on 10 September 2006, King Taufa‘āhau Tupou IV who had reigned for over forty years, was succeeded by his eldest son, who took on the regnal name of George Tupou V, acknowledging the long-standing connection the royal family had with the name. King George Tupou V’s youngest sibling, Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka

441 Ibid.
Ata, was officially designated by his brother to be the heir presumptive a few weeks later, taking on the formal title of Tupouto’a, the senior title designated for the Crown Prince. It is unclear when Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata had accepted that he might be King one day; at the latest it seems it would have been upon the death of his brother Ma’atu and possibly as early as when Ma’atu was stripped of his princely title in 1980. This is important when considering the role and place of the current Tongan King. For the first twenty-one years of his life, nobody, least of all himself, expected that he would one day be King, meaning he had a very different upbringing and training to his older brother, Tupou V, who was treated as a future King from his birth.

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<tr>
<td>King Tupou VI</td>
<td>Queen Nanasipau‘u</td>
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<tr>
<td>Princess Angelika Lâtūfu'ipeka Halaevalu Mata‘aho</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown Prince Tupouto‘a ‘Ulukalala</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Crown Princess Sinaitakala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Tāufa‘āhau</td>
<td>Princess Halaevalu Mata‘aho</td>
<td>Princess Nanasipau‘u Eliana</td>
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**Table 10. Current immediate line of the Tupou dynasty**

Source. Developed by the author

Crown Prince Tupouto‘a Lavaka (as he was then known having had the Noble title ‘Ulukalala handed down to his eldest son Prince Siaosi Manumataonga ‘Alaivahamama‘o ‘Aho‘eitu Tuku‘aho, and the Noble title Ata, to his second son Prince Viliami ‘Unuaki-‘o-Tonga Mumui Lalaka-Mo-e-‘Eiki Tuku‘aho), became King Tupou VI on 18 March 2012 (see Table 10).442

442 The Crown Prince Tupouto’a Lavaka chose the regnal name Tupou VI.
The rise of the *tu‘a*: Tonga’s first elected commoner prime minister

Feleti Sevele was the first Tongan commoner to become prime minister after being appointed on 11 February 2006 initially by the then Prince Regent, Crown Prince Tupouto‘a (later Tupou V) following the resignation of the then Prime Minister, Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata (later Crown Prince Tupouto‘a Lavaka, and then King Tupou VI). Dr Sevele, who was a member of the Cabinet for less than a year, had previously been an elected Peoples’ Representative. His appointment as prime minister was later formalised by King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV on 30 March 2006, and he held office until 22 December 2010 when he chose not to stand in the first post-reform elections, despite playing a significant role in the reform process.

Tonga’s first *elected* commoner prime minister, indeed the first truly democratically elected person to hold the office, was elected on 29 December 2014. Samiuela ‘Akilisi Pōhiva, a long-standing politician in Tonga who has been at the forefront of the democratic movement since the 1970s, became Tonga’s sixteenth Prime Minister and second only prime minister of commoner descent. Pōhiva’s election was described by the mainstream media in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand as the start of the rise of the commoner class in Tonga, but in reality, it was something that was to be expected after the democratic reforms of 2010. While it was not predicted, mainly because commentators appeared to assume that the commoner MPs would not vote together as a bloc, neither was it a huge surprise to observers of Tongan politics. The actual election of the prime minister was very close. The process for the election of the prime minister is limited to those who are elected members of the parliament; that is the twenty-six members made up of seventeen People’s Representatives and nine Noble’s

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Representatives. Although it is not necessarily a guarantee, it was expected that the nine Nobles’ Representatives would vote as a bloc as they are essentially a combined group (or party) in the Tongan political system and vote together on almost every single matter before the parliament. But of the seventeen People’s Representatives, only nine were of ‘Akilisi Pōhiva’s democratic party, and eight were independents. This essentially meant the Nobles had nine seats and Pōhiva had nine seats and each side would have to try to win support of the eight independents to get a majority (fourteen) to make government. While many commentators had assumed that the independents would lean towards the Nobles, since the Nobles had run government for much of Tonga’s history, including in the last term of the parliament, the vote actually went Pōhiva’s way. He received fifteen votes compared with eleven for the candidate the Nobles had supported.

Pōhiva’s platform for election was very much based on overhauling the financial commitments and improving the moral fibre of government. His view as Leader of the Opposition was that government had been run too much like a personal estate by some ministers, and that the nobility, who had long been in control of government, was not accountable to the people, particularly in relation to finances, and they did not behave in a manner that demonstrates service to the public. In his inaugural speech as Prime Minister, which was broadcast live on Tonga radio and television, he stated that his government

must establish a solid foundation for the present, and acknowledge without prejudice, that the government in a critical financial condition exacerbated by an extremely worrisome debt burden which if not managed now, will have to be dealt with by our children’s children. As a government, these issues are reflected in our inability over the past four years to carry our

444 Interview with Lord Fusitu’a (current), June 2018.
445 Ibid.
446 Interview with Samiuela ‘Akilisi Pohiva, December 2012.
own recurrent budget costs. The bulk of the recurrent budget is for salaries as the government remains the major employer in the nation. There remains severe financial constraints on our ability to provide the services which … are vital for efficient and effective administration of the nation.\textsuperscript{447}

In acknowledging his previous criticism of governments, particularly around their service (which in his view was lacking) to the public, Pohiva went on to say:

I am delighted that the early reports of the media since my appointment, states that I am calling for a government of high moral fibre, and I reaffirm today that I believe, that this is the only way we can succeed as a national government. The nation must be able to demand standards of excellence from their leaders.

For almost 30 years, I have been a critic of this side of the table and now I am sitting here, at the head, I must be careful not to criticise myself out! There is a high expectation in the delivery of public service and today, I call upon all of us in public office, and in the civil service to understand that only standards of excellence will be acceptable going forward. This is a non-negotiable. I am pleased that the early media reports of my coming into office emphasizes my commitment to ensuring that I lead a government of high moral fibre.\textsuperscript{448}

While those who had observed Pohiva’s career would not be surprised by any of these particular comments made in his speech, there was a level of uncertainty about the new prime minister in the ranks of the Nobility and Royal family. One staff member in the Royal household explained that


\textsuperscript{448} Ibid.
everyone is just watching to see what happens over the next few days and weeks. We don’t really know what to expect from him. He has long been vocal against the monarchy and nobles but he does not see them as the enemy, rather that they need to change.449

Pohiva’s first speech highlighted a desire to start making changes from inside the government first and then ‘out to the nation’, but it was unusual in that he spent a good part of it apologising for past behaviours and seeking forgiveness, including from the King.

I am going to ask all of you in the nation or any Tongan residing abroad, for your forgiveness, if you have been impacted in any manner by what I have believed to be the only course of action open to me, at various times, during our nation’s journey toward full democracy in government. At times, I have quietly felt that the personal cost to me and my immediate family and close associates, and all of you who have stood by my side at any time during the 30-year journey, may have been too great … I also realise that I and the pro-democracy movement may have been seen as the enemy of the status quo and it seemed that I was anti-government, anti-monarchy, and anti-nobility. Nothing could be farther from the truth.450

He went on to say:

I have in full sincerity, asked for the forgiveness of the Monarchy, and I now ask the forgiveness of the Nobility and the people of Tonga for both real and perceived transgressions, and plead that our mutual love for our nation be allowed to rise above what is considered, our political differences … Perhaps my government is not what was [the] expected answer to the prayers, but let us all be humbled by the knowledge that it is God

449 Personal communication, name withheld.
450 ‘Inaugural speech of Prime Minister Samiuela ‘Akilisi Pōhiva to the Civil Service and the Nation’.
Almighty that appoints and disappoints … Perhaps, we can start on that basis to rebuild our nation aiming to glorify God, our King and nation.\textsuperscript{451}

These comments appeared rather unusual to me when I first read the speech, but after speaking with a number of Tongan friends I was assured that given Pohiva’s long history of combat with governments, mainly made up of Nobles, it was very appropriate for him to start his prime ministership in this way. One interlocutor explained that it was very normal in Tonga to apologise profusely even for something you believed was right, to show you value the relationship more than your pride… Pohiva wanted his time as PM to be successful which meant working with the King and nobles not against them.\textsuperscript{452}

The reason this speech is so important in the context of this chapter is because it links the life and birth of Tupou VI (born almost never being expected to be King, yet going on to do so) and democracy in Tonga. The point is that Tongan democracy and the monarchy can, and do, work beside each other, both evolving and growing as society changes with time. This of course, includes the growing push for greater women’s representation in Tongan democracy. Interestingly, the Prime Minister also referred to the place of women in Tongan society in his inaugural speech:

Secondly, we represent a government that puts a high priority on our women and youth, which combines to form the majority of the population of Tonga. The issue of non-representation of women in the Legislative Assembly is not taken lightly by my government and we will endeavour during this four year term to support all initiatives that reach out to educate women who are voters to be the primary advocates of women representatives. We need balance in the Legislative Assembly for sure, but the hand that deals the cards in this instance, are women voters who represent in fact the majority of voters. It is tragic that

\textsuperscript{451} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{452} Interview with Tevita, December 2012.
although there are over 50 percent of women voters, that no representatives have been voted into the Assembly since the 2010 election.\textsuperscript{453}

It would appear that the Prime Minister’s speech is not backed up by meaningful action. For example, immediately after his election to office, despite being able to appoint up to two people to the Cabinet from outside of the parliament, Pohiva had no women in his Cabinet. He has also failed to ratify the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) despite numerous women groups and leaders advocating for him to do so. Many aspects of this speech relate to different interviews conducted throughout my research. In particular, the overwhelming response was ‘yes’ to my question, ‘Should Tonga have a number of seats for women in the Legislative Assembly?’ which I only asked of my Tongan interlocutors. The general view was that if it is good enough to have specific seats for Nobles then there should be specific seats for women too. ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu said that the time was right because ‘our system of politics has been set up with men in mind and the only way to change that is to have women in there to inject a new mindset’\textsuperscript{454}. Tevita agreed, saying that while ideally the people would encourage more women to stand and then support them to be elected, it seemed ‘a long way off before we get the balance right and in the meantime there should be a quota of seats that only women can fill’\textsuperscript{455}. The issue of representation of women in Tonga, and indeed gender equality, is still incredibly fraught. In both the 2010 and 2014 elections, no women were elected, and there has only ever been three women appointed to ministerial positions (and five women to hold seats in the parliament) in over 150 years of formal government in

\textsuperscript{453} ‘Inaugural speech of Prime Minister Samiuela ‘Akilisi Pōhiva to the Civil Service and the Nation’.

\textsuperscript{454} Interview with ‘Akanesi Palu-Tatafu, no. 2, December 2012.

\textsuperscript{455} Interview with Tevita, December 2012.
Tonga. But this came as no surprise to many of my interlocutors, with some saying that women have constantly been on the back foot since the Constitution ensured in 1875 that only men could inherit land and associated noble titles. The Constitution, as Saunoamaali’i Karanina Sumeo explained, reflects the language and ideals of European missionaries, explorers … about property ownership … Traditional land tenure enabled owners of registered land to informally share it with siblings including sisters, cousins … When the Constitution was enacted, it did not codify the traditional land tenure practices and negatively affected women’s access to land … important amendments were made to the Constitution 1875 and the Land Act 1927 during the reign of Queen Salote … The first Land Commission was established in 1918 during Queen Salote’s reign … The changes that resulted included provision for women to lease land … although they remained marginalised as the succession rules were not changed … The reports of the RLC identified discrimination against women in land laws. King Tupou V unfortunately passed away before responding to the RLC report. The King was believed to be have been open to improving land rights for women.457

Even with restrictions on female land ownership, some of my female interlocuters felt that Tongan women have no need to get involved in politics. This echoes the comments attributed to Lady ‘Ainise Sevele, wife of the (now) Lord Feleti Sevele, who said,

We know our place in our society. Women have a big voice in the running of the family, but the man has to make the final decision. In any other country they will challenge that, but in


This view was shared by one of my interlocutors who said, when I asked him why women were so underrepresented in political office that it was of their own making and they choose not to.

You might think it’s tough for women in Tonga and that they need women’s rights groups like in Australia but it’s the opposite. You actually need men’s rights groups in Tonga. Women have more than enough.459

While outside the focus of this thesis, women’s rights and representation in Tonga were discussed throughout my interviews in detail, and my overall conclusion was that my interlocutors did feel gender equality in Tonga was a matter of concern and one that requires significantly more study and attention. It would seem to me that until Tonga can address the issues of gender equality in the political space, its democracy is severely weakened. Returning to the focus of this chapter, the progress in Tonga toward democracy continues, and as noted by the Prime Minister, is not weakened in any way by the monarchy, nor is the monarchy threatened by the increase in democracy within Tonga as the new political order continues to evolve.

Conclusion

Tonga’s ‘new order still sets it apart from all other Pacific Islands polities … it is unique in the extent to which it preserves an important role for traditional high-ranking leaders in politics’.460 Today’s Tongan polity is a substantially different one to that within which Tupou I operated, but it is still very much influenced by the foundations

458 Peter Munro, ‘The friendly islands are no friend to women’, Sydney Morning Herald, 11 July 2015.

459 Interview with Falekava Kupu, no. 1, June 2012.

460 Campbell, Tonga’s Way to Democracy.
he laid in the mid-eighteenth century. The Tongan Constitution positioned the Monarch as the head of government and as the head of state, however ‘the Monarch has always been, and still is, of course, the hau, or traditional leader of all Tongans, which role is unaffected’ by the Constitution and recent reforms to it.\textsuperscript{461} Powles is correct that the Monarch has a more ‘traditional’ role as he is also the head of a kinship system that in a sense undergirds the constitutional government system.

I argue that the move to democracy is the most significant development in Tongan society in recent years. While there is no doubt that the democratic reforms of 2010 have changed the face of Tongan politics, so much so that the first ever democratically elected prime minister was elected in 2014, a stable democracy and monarchy will need to be both responsive to and able to resist many global trends that have the potential to impact heavily on Tonga’s political stability into the future.

Although the evolution towards a more democratic system of government is a significant shift from the previous system, it is not a radical reform in the way the initial promulgation of a Constitution in 1875 was. Indeed, as some have observed, the relatively peaceful transition to democracy with no overthrowing of the monarchy or nobility demonstrates that there is ability for both to coexist. The question is how to ensure this coexistence is harmonious. Tonga’s political future may not be clearly written on a roadmap for all to follow, but it is built on a roadmap established by the early work of Tupou I and further developed by his descendants. Democracy clearly impacts upon Tonga’s system of government but it is does not have to be seen as a threat to the monarchy when, in fact, it is one of many facets of the Tongan social order that has evolved in a way that the people can embrace. In considering the analogy of weaving a mat together, democracy is but a new thread in the mat of the Tongan nation. Democratic reforms have not diminished the relevance of the monarchy in Tonga. It is

\textsuperscript{461} Powles, ‘The Tongan monarchy and the constitution’.
only in embracing democracy—monarchy in partnership with democracy—that the Tongan monarchy will ensure its survival well into the future.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion: Kinship Reigns

This concluding chapter weaves the various threads of my thesis together, but, as with any ongoing social research it highlights that there are still many hanging threads and unanswered questions. This thesis has endeavoured to make a contribution to the greater body of work on Tonga’s political system and government, and its broader history, especially in relation to the monarchy.

Focus on the voices of interlocutors

My thesis actively uses the voices of my, predominantly Tongan, interlocutors as much as possible. I am honouring the voices of Tongan people and ensuring that their narrative is reflected in my work as the basis for the development of my own thoughts and conclusions. Of course, the broader scholarship available in published literature is immensely valuable, but it is important to note that it is predominantly non-Tongan academics who are published experts on Tongan history, law and anthropology. With no desire to criticise the many leading scholars on Tonga, whose works have made such a significant contribution, I wanted to move away from echoing their work and instead amplify the voices of Tongans as much as possible, recognising that I have only engaged a limited number. As a Pacific Islander scholar who grew up reading about my own people in texts more often than not written by non-Pacific Islanders, I have a strong desire to see Pacific voices reflected in any texts written about them and their cultures. This thesis was influenced heavily by Pacific scholars, whether by their written works, in hearing from them at conferences such as the Australian Association for Pacific Studies (AAPS), in conversations with them, or indeed by having one as a PhD supervisor in the case of Associate Professor Katerina Teaiwa. Given my specific topic
it has been the works of Tongan scholars such as Sione Lātūkefu, Epeli Hau'ofa and Tēvita O. Ka‘ili, that have been most insightful.

For example, I started this PhD journey knowing that like my own people, Tongans see themselves as interconnected (woven) with each other and with the land. But in Tēvita O. Ka‘ili’s work on Tauhi vā I was introduced to the Tongan saying ‘Oku hangē ‘a e tangata ha fala ‘oku lālanga’ (Mankind is like a mat being woven). 462 Ka‘ili explained how significant the concept of weaving relations and relationships is for Tongans. ‘Weaving metaphors are frequently found in Tongan ideas of people and genealogy … [There is a] Tongan idea that a person is woven genealogically from multiple and overlapping kinship strands.’ 463 Insights like that have given a depth that even I as a fellow Indigenous Pacific Islander could not give because I am not Tongan.

For my interlocutors, the reality of the lives they live either in Tonga, or as Tongans in the diaspora, has the greatest of importance to me and my research. To an extent, everything else is simply observations of people who are not living the lives of Tongan people. As much as we might feel connected to it or feel we understand it because of our research and experiences, there is no substitute for being Tongan, and no matter how closely connected one is (even in my case with Tongan family and friends), there was a level of understanding I could not get, given what I was researching was not about my own culture and heritage. It is also easy for a non-Tongan to assume that knowledge they have is superior (or indeed accurate) simply because the person they learned it from held an elite position. This was always a risk in my case given my proximity to people of influence in Tonga. And, as outlined in Chapter One, I needed to


ensure that my thesis was not slanted towards the views of the elite, something I have tried very hard to accomplish.

This thesis explored Tongan kingship and kinship in depth and it acknowledged the prominence that Tongans give their King as well as the constitutional powers he exercises. It is apparent that there is an intimate and powerful relationship between kingship and kinship in Tonga that is both similar and different to other Pacific Island nations with chiefly structures. However, this thesis has sought to specifically explore what is unique about Tonga, that is, what is Tongan kinship and its relationship with Tongan kingship. In seven chapters, which include the introduction, I have explored a range of issues related to Tonga’s kinship that have led me to my key conclusions outlined at the end of this chapter. Before doing so, I will outline some areas where I was not able to delve deeply enough due to my own constraints (time, scope and resources).

**Recommendations for further research**

There are a number of areas that I cover in this thesis where I am very conscious that my own analysis was limited either by the scope of my thesis topic, the time available to me in completing this thesis, or my resources (a good example here is the ability to have certain Tongan texts or archives translated). The two specific areas where I would recommend further research relate to the representativeness of the nine Noble seats in Parliament, and the evolution of the three distinct levels of the Tongan language and how this works in practice in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Seven looked closely at the state of Tonga’s democracy and it touched on the fact that some people were not convinced that Tonga was a ‘true’ democracy; one main reason for this being that the nine Nobles’ Representative seats in parliament were elected only by the thirty-three Noble title holders. I believe that there would be benefit in exploring what Tongans see as the value (or not) of the Noble seats, and
whether there is an appetite for changing the way they are elected. This research would also need to explore electoral systems and democratic theory to understand whether the process is truly democratic.

One of the things I felt most limited by in undertaking my research for this thesis was the fact I was not fluent in lea fakatonga. The point was made to me by a Tongan friend that even if I studied Tongan language intensely for six months a year, it would still be hard to fully grasp the subtleties of the three ‘levels’ of the Tongan language. On a number of occasions while engaging with Tongans in the diaspora, it was apparent to me that they did not fully understand what words to change when addressing a member of the royal family. I was also told by numerous interlocutors that they would not have any idea about how to speak properly with the King, with one woman mentioning that she once met him but did not know how to speak the language reserved for the King so she simply smiled and said nothing. If I had had more time I would have spent it exploring this topic, particularly in light of my experiences with Tongans in the diaspora. There are questions here not only about how the language tier system works, or has worked, but whether it will survive given the reality that even many Tongans who speak the base Tongan language cannot speak the higher two levels.

**Chapter conclusions**

This thesis comprised a prologue and eight chapters (including this concluding chapter). The Prologue established my positionality as a Pacific Islander who was connected to Tonga but not Tongan. Importantly, it set the scene for how I would approach my research noting that I did not see myself as an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’, and neither did some of my Tongan friends and interlocutors. Having completed my research I acknowledge that my position was a privileged one because, while I did experience some people assuming I was too closely connected to my royal friends, I also had others who spoke with me only because they knew who my friends were, and others who
would never have made the time to speak with me without the introduction by my friends. After the Prologue, Chapter One outlined my research approach and questions. In Chapter Two, I sought to situate Tongan kingship in relation to other Pacific models of leadership, governance and monarchies in close proximity to Tonga. This is where I outline how Tonga’s monarchy has been influenced by the Hawaiian Kingdom, and its relationships with the Kīngitanga of Aotearoa New Zealand. In Chapter Two I also considered the role of Christianity and its significant impact both on Tongan kingship and Tongan kinship.

Chapter Three discussed what has essentially evolved into a three-tiered Tongan class system of King and his immediate royal family, nobles and commoners. This chapter explored the key concepts that underpin Tongan sociality such as fahu, anga fakatonga, mana and tapu. These concepts were further explained by the use of stories from my fieldwork which I hope provided an insight into how much my field work was full of lessons that often came in my simple daily interactions with my interlocutors, or my friends and their families.

In Chapter Four, I explored the issue of what the King symbolised by considering the different perspectives of my interlocutors, analysing newspaper articles, and using artworks primarily by Tongan artists. My intention was to look at Tongan kingship through different lenses, and to outline some of the subtleties and intricacies associated with the role of the King both in Tonga, and around the world wherever Tongans might reside.

Chapter Five disrupted the narrative flow since it was a late addition that came only after I realised that many of my interlocutors were talking about the role of the Queen consort. I see this chapter, which focused on King Tupou VI’s consort, Queen Nanasiapau’u, and her role, as a reminder that my research was a partnership with interlocutors, and also of the gender dynamics of monarchy. This chapter explored the
status of the Queen consort in Tonga, and made the argument that for kingship to be fully functional in the eyes of Tongan people, the role of a Queen consort is pivotal.

In Chapter Six, I built on the rich body of literature on Tongan transnationalism and the argument that Tonga is not a small and insignificant group of islands in the vast Pacific Ocean, but in fact a growing group of people, interactions, exchanges and ideas. While there are challenges in the contemporary development of a Tongan identity, and the connection Tongans in the diaspora have to their homeland and how Tongan practices are maintained by them, there is a strong argument that Tongans are still a distinct group of people with a shared heritage and identity that connects and binds them to Tonga. This chapter found that just as Tonga’s population is growing, Tonga’s kinship system is also expanding, and therefore, so too is the role of the King. It argued that this broadening kingship is intricately connected to Tonga’s expanding kinship networks.

Chapter Seven situated Tonga’s modern political system in context and demonstrated how the traditional structures of governance under a monarchy are able to exist side-by-side with democracy. I called this chapter ‘From Tu’i to Tu’a’ signifying what I see as a radical transformation in the shift of power from the King and Nobility, to the people. Responding to some scholars and interlocutors who argued that Tonga cannot truly be a democracy with the monarchy as it is, I argue that not only can the monarchy and democracy coexist harmoniously, but that Tonga evinces a thriving modern, Pacific-styled democracy that maintains a respect for its traditional kinship hierarchy.

This concluding chapter asserts the key argument that Tonga is not ruled by a King, and never has been. Tonga is governed first and foremost by a kinship system that underpins all social interactions. The King is but one of many layers of this kinship system and each layer is interconnected and interdependent. This final chapter
concludes my thesis by outlining the central argument of this work: that Tonga is not governed by kingship, it is governed by kinship.

This thesis presents a different view to that promoted by the mainstream media in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, that the King is the powerful ruler of Tonga who is detached from the people and only acting in his own self-interest.\textsuperscript{464} It also refuses to view Tonga as a ‘small’, insignificant country because of its population or lack of material wealth.\textsuperscript{465} These views are widely held and understandably so. For the Western media, and other observers of Tonga who do not have an understanding of anga fakatonga, it makes sense to see the King at the apex, a position of immense privilege. The King is without doubt a powerful person exercising important functions constitutionally and having influence over the affairs of Tongans both in Tonga and the Tongan diaspora. But these views are only seeing certain superficial layers of Tongan kingship. For Tongans, their King is a core part of their kinship system. Indeed, my conclusion is that kingship in Tonga, as important as it is, is only one layer of the kinship system (see Figure 42). Tongan society is not governed by kingship, it is governed by kinship.


Principal conclusions

And so to bring my thesis to a conclusion I end with four key arguments:

The first is that diverse Tongan voices must be given prominence in the writing of Tongan stories and Tongan history. This thesis has not only striven to give prominence to the voices of Tongans, it had to otherwise it would have very little credibility. I believe that only a Tongan could truly understand and explain what Tongan kinship is. Only a Tongan has a lived experience of having a fahu. Only a Tongan knows what it is like to be related to their King. The more time I spent in Tonga, and with Tongan people in the diaspora, the more I realised that there was only so much I could ever truly understand and that this thesis could only have a meaningful contribution to make if it considered and expressed the voices of the Tongan people directly. I have tried to do that as much as possible while also acknowledging that my interlocutors are only a small group of individuals, each with their own perspectives and biases.

The second lesson that shaped my conclusion is that Tonga is a contested space. It is bigger and more complex than what is physically seen, touched and lived in Tonga
the country. There are many layers to Tonga, and to the Tongan kinship system, and this thesis has only touched the surface of many of these. In the way the great scholar Epeli Hau'ofa implored Pacific Islanders to not measure our worth by the smallness of our islands but by the greatness of our oceans,\(^{466}\) I argue that Tonga must be seen less as an insular physical place and more as a people and their culture; that are continually changing and being contested. Tonga is not one nation based in a particular geographical region as it used to be, it is now a trans-nation with members living all across the globe.

The third lesson is that Tonga’s democratic reforms have not necessarily weakened the position of the King, because Tongan kingship is much broader based than government and governance elsewhere. Tonga’s democracy has matured and strengthened in recent years but not at the expense of the monarchy as some commentators and scholars would argue. Of course, Tongans want to have a say over their affairs\(^{467}\) and democracy gives all Tongans a voice in the political system. But Tongans deeply value their culture and heritage; the ways of their ancestors that have been passed down over many generations. A big part of their heritage is the idea that the King is the head of the Tongan kinship system. The King is, first and foremost, a Tongan kinsman and in that sense is connected to every other Tongan kinsperson wherever they are situated in the world. He is connected by blood to all Tongans, noblemen and commoners alike, and so he is them and they are him. This unbreakable kinship connection is much more important than any constitutional role he has, and if Tonga were to become a republic and have an elected president take the constitutional place of the King, the place of the King in Tonga’s kinship system would remain


\(^{467}\) As made clear to me in a number of interviews, including with ‘Akilisi Pohiva, December 2012; David Dunkley, December 2012.
unchanged. As Lady Fusitu‘a expressed in an interview with me, the only way to remove the King from the head of Tonga’s kinship system would be for every Tongan person to disappear.468

To see the place of kingship, one can imagine a finely woven mat with different coloured threads that are woven to create beautiful patterns. Of course, the mat is fine but it is not perfect and some strands cross over others, but nonetheless the mat is strong and even when walked on or sat on, it retains its strength of purpose. In many ways the mat is Tonga, and the threads are made up of the different peoples and elements of Tonga. The mat would be very plain if it was just one colour, and likewise it would not be strongly held together if there were not different materials and threads used tie the ends down (together). These different threads and fabrics represent the people, the nobles, and the King all woven together as part of the Tongan kinship. There is no kingship without the others, and there is no Tonga as we know it today without either. Tonga’s democratic journey is no threat to Tongan kingship.

In the same way that democracy in the United Kingdom works and is seen as robust, Tonga can become a fully democratic government and still have a monarchy with a role and position not too dissimilar to that of the UK today.

Indeed, I argue that for the monarchy to survive well into the future it will need to continue to adapt and work alongside democracy. The central argument is Tonga is not governed by a King, it is governed by a deep kinship system based on reciprocity and connectedness.

Tonga’s kinship system is similar to its Pacific neighbours in many ways, but there is also a fundamental difference: the place of the King in Tonga. The Tongan kinship system gives prominence to the King, who is the senior-most descendant of the Tu‘i. This position is representative of Tonga’s history and its present position as the

468 Conversation with Lady Eseta Fusitu‘a, December 2012.
only country in the Pacific that was not colonised by a European power. The King has no *mana* or status without being intricately linked to the kinship system, and the Tongan kinship system is just like any other in the Pacific without the fundamental place of the King at its core. In Tonga today, while the King has a prominent role as the constitutional Head of State, to Tongans his role as *Tu’i* is more important because it connects him as kin to each and every Tongan person, wherever they are in the world. The role and place of the King is only possible because of the existence and continuity of a complex range of (reciprocal) practices that make the Tongan kinship system.

This thesis demonstrates that the King is important to Tongans, but primarily as a part of the broader kinship system which positions him in relation to others. In Tonga the King rules, but only because constitutionally he has been given such powers which can ultimately, albeit with some difficulty, be removed by that same constitution. But the position of head of the Tongan kinship system cannot be removed unless, as Lady Fusitu’a said, the Tongan kinship system itself were to disappear. For as long as there are direct descendants of the *Tu’i*, and Tongan people who identify with Tonga, there will always be a place for the King as head of the kinship system. This goes deeply to the core of what makes Tonga and also shows the complexity in roles and relationships. But this thesis has shown that the King currently has dual roles. One as the Head of State, and the other as head of the Tongan kinship system, which this thesis has argued is much more important. As Falekava Kupu said in an interview, ‘The King is only one man. But he represents a much bigger thing.’

Thinking about the King as a person, and as one element within a broader entity, it would be fair to say that while the King rules, kinship reigns.

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[469] Interview with Falekava Kupu, no.1, June 2012.
Information Sheet: Research on Tongan Kingship and Kinship

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project which will inform my work, writing a thesis on the relationship between kingship and kinship in Tonga. I am a PhD Scholar in Pacific Studies, in the School of Culture, History and Language at The Australian National University (ANU) and am of Māori (Ngāti Kauwhata, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Haua, Waikato-Tainui), Cook Island and Tahitian descent. I have many Tongan friends in Tonga and in Tongan communities in Australia and New Zealand.

Research details

The primary focus of my research project is the question of what it means to be king in Tonga and what the king means to the people of Tonga, using the life of the late King George Tupou V as the central subject. I am conducting this particular project (in Tonga, Australia and New Zealand) as a component of my PhD. I have asked you to participate because you bring an understanding and awareness of the life of His Late Majesty that will help to make my research richer.

This research project is funded through an Australian Research Council Laureate Grant awarded to ANU Professor Margaret Jolly, who is my supervisor. Data from this research will be used in my PhD thesis and may be published in academic journals, books, online, or in other forums.

Your involvement

Participation in this project is on a purely voluntary basis and will consist of an interview for 1 to 2 hours with me. If more time is needed, I will request that we meet at
a later time; in this instance, you are free to decline. If you agree, the interview may be audio or videotaped. I may also contact you later to follow up or clarify any issues left unclear after the interview.

Interview questions will cover the following themes:

- The view people have about the role of the king in Tonga and the relationship between king and people;
- The role of Christianity in Tonga and in relation to the king;
- The type of leadership style that is expected of a Tongan king;
- The early death of King George Tupou V and his funeral;
- The relationship between kingship and kinship in Tonga.

Information for participants

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. The primary researcher is Areti Metuamate. Questions may be addressed to me at Areti.Metuamate@anu.edu.au or +61 4 2550 5222.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research process at any time.

By agreeing to the interview and signing the attached Consent Form, it is acknowledged that you understand that the information you provide in interviews may be used in the thesis. However, you will not be identified unless you specifically agree to be, and you can ask for any information that you provide me not to be published at any time.

Data will be stored as securely as possible to protect the identity and privacy of each participant, including being stripped of all identifying information and kept behind locked doors. It will be kept for 5 years after publication.

Research participants may address any complaints that arise from their involvement in the research project to the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, The Australian National University, ACT 0200, Australia. Telephone +61 2 6125 3427, email Human.Ethics.Office@anu.edu.au.
Consent Form

I have read the participant *Information Sheet* and I understand the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. My consent is freely given.

- I agree to take part in this research;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary;
- I understand that I will not be paid to take part in this project;
- I agree/ do not agree to be named and identified in this research;
- I understand that the interview will last approximately 1–2 hours;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation or decline to answer any question at any time;
- I agree / do not agree to be videotaped;
- I agree / do not agree to be audiotaped;
- I understand that I can request to stop the recording any time during the interview without giving reason;
- I wish / do not wish to have my tapes returned to me;
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings;
- I understand that data will be kept for 5 years after publication;
- I understand that this research is funded by an Australian Research Council Laureate Grant.

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this research project. If I have any questions or concerns about my participation in this research I know I can contact the researcher, Areti Metuamate.

Name (printed)______________________ Signature ___________________________

Date ______________________________

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher on telephone +61 4 2550 5222 or by email Areti.Metuamate@anu.edu.au.

Research participants may address any complaints that arise from their involvement in the research project to the Ethics Officer, Research Services Office, The Australian National University, ACT 0200, telephone +61 2 6125 3427, email Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au.
Appendix B

List of interlocutors

Note. Not all the names of the people who generously gave me the opportunity and time to interview them are listed here because some preferred to either speak off-the-record, or to use a pseudonym. I thank each and every one of the people who gave me their time, insights and support, those listed below, and those who have chosen not to be.

Akanesi Tu‘ifua Palu-Tatafu
David Dunkley
Dr Fred (Feleti) Sevele
Dr Semisi Taumoepeau
Falekava Kupu (Rest in Peace)
Fakailoatonga Taumoefolau
Paul Aitu-Johansson
King Tupou VI
Queen Nanasipau‘u Tuku‘aho
Princess Angelika Tuku‘aho
The Hon Lupepau‘u Tuita (now Taione)
Lord Fusitu‘a (Siaosi Uikilifi ‘Alokuo‘ulo)
Lady Eseta Fusitu‘a
Lord Fusitu‘a (Matai‘ulua-‘i-Fonuamotu)
Crown Prince Tupouto‘a ‘Ulukalala
Prince Ata
Lord Luani
Lord Fakafanua
Princess Pilolevu Tuita
The Hon Virginia Tuita (now Aleamotu‘a)
Lord Vaea
Crown Princess Sinaitakala Tuku‘aho
Afuha‘apai Matoto-Aho
Manutu‘ufanga Naufahu
Benjamin Naufahu
Dr Steven Sisifa
Erwin Ludewig
The Hon Frederica Tuita (now Filipe)
Kerry Waalkens
The Hon Ivana Vaea
‘Akilisi Pohiva
Kat Lobendahn
Christine Caughey
Susana Mangisi
Angus Rogers
Jenny Rogers
Anthony Grant
Joseph Naufahu
Apolosio Taulanga
Violet Taulanga
Ana (pseudonym)
Maata (pseudonym)
Tevita (pseudonym)
Seini (pseudonym)
Sione (pseudonym)
## Appendix C

### List of Noble Titles

1. Ata
2. ‘Ahomeʻe
3. Fakafānua
4. Fakatulolo
5. Fielakepa
6. Fohe
7. Fotofili
8. Fulivai
9. Fusitu’a
10. Kalaniuvalu
11. Lasike
12. Luani
13. Lāvaka
14. Malupō
15. Ma‘afu
16. Mā‘atu
17. Niukapu
18. Nuku
19. Tangipā
20. Tuita
21. Tungī
22. Tupouto’a
23. Tu‘iha‘angana
24. Tu‘iha‘ateiho
25. Tu‘ilakepa
26. Tu‘ipelehake
27. Tu'ivakanō
28. Tu‘i‘āfitu
29. Vaea
30. Vaha‘i
31. Veikune
32. Ve‘ehala
33. ‘Ulukālala
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