TEENA BROWN PULU

"Ma'afu's Word is in the Hills" What is a Noble's Role in a Democratised Tonga?

Foreword

> Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.
>
> Winston Churchill

The Kingdom of Tonga's nobility, a land owning class of thirty three title holders and estates – all men – have been the subject of scrutiny and criticism in the political reform of this small island developing state from an absolute monarchy to a democratised state and society. A range of viewpoints have emerged since the November 2010 general election signalling the advent of a new parliamentary arrangement. This afforded greater representation of seventeen people's representatives elected from registered voters on the general role to that of the nobility, nine nobles elected to the House from their class group of landed gentry.

Opinions are put forward by ordinary citizens. The nobility, by comparison, have been reluctant to respond as a collective. However, individual nobles have reacted against arguments that their election to parliament is altered (Radio New Zealand 2012a). An idea which has surfaced is that the nobles should not be elected by their class group, but made to stand for election on the general roll and compete with

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ordinary citizen candidates. Alternatively, there is the case which the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands intends to move as a private member's bill in the legislature (Tahana 2012). Voters on the general roll could elect the nine noble representatives to parliament, rather than the nobility choosing among themselves who is in and who is out. Lastly, there is the harsher stand that the nobility be ousted from the political makeup of parliament, and instead be ordered to go back to their estates and take care of their people, their villages. Whatever way one sees Tonga in change the discussion about the role of nobles in a democratised state and society is politically loaded, highly contested and charged in conflicted emotion. Are they in or are they out? Furthermore, how will their inclusion strengthen the South Pacific's youngest democracy?

This paper analyses the political tensions of Tonga in change, the transition period of witnessing democratic reform unfold over 2011 and 2012. Consideration is given to the head of state changeover of 2012 due to the state funeral and mourning period of King George Tupou V and the ascent to the throne of King Tupou VI, the youngest sibling of the late monarch. The ethnography focuses on understanding what social and political change means for Tongans by comparing various opinions in public media. In particular, the essay presents an ethnographic account of modifying tradition for the Noble Ma'afu, head of the Ha'a Havea Lahi, which is the largest and oldest confederation of nobles, villages and clans in the Kingdom of Tonga. Here is an exploration into how one noble is coping with the contemporary demands to transform convention, as well as the strategies used to maintain political stability and peaceful reform in the face of rapid change and uncertainty.

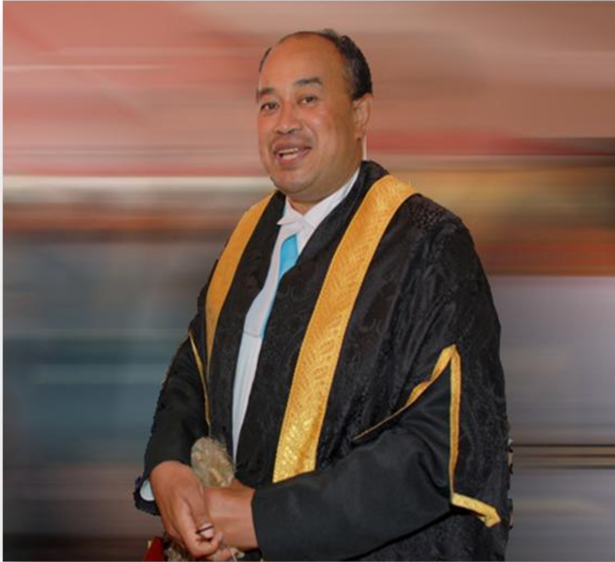
Something has got to give

The first time I read the message that the Kingdom of Tonga's nobility were a redundant colonial remnant from the nineteenth century of no practical use in today's democratic organisation of state and society was in Kalafi Moala's first book, *Island Kingdom Strikes Back: The Story of an Independent Island Newspaper – Taimi 'o Tonga* (2002, p. 296).

> The nobility created by Tupou I at the outset of his reign in the late 1840s should be abolished. It is no longer relevant to today's Tonga. The nobility is an obsolete, perfunctory aristocratic structure. Putting it bluntly, nobles are useless and should join the ranks of everyone else.

I was a naive PhD student and felt conflicted emotion, both startled and amused to rationalise what I had read; that is, Tonga's thirty three nobles may not be a permanent feature of social and political life. My matrilineal uncle, Siale 'Ataongo Kaho, was the Noble Tu'ivakano. My matrilineal second cousin was the Baron Fielakepa. Processing the thought that they may be demoted to the lowly rank of everyday people was perplexing. Often I had heard Tongans exclaim that the "nobles are useless" and perform no valuable service to community. But to see this published was a first. The greatest indignity rested in the allegation that the nobility, whose job it was to serve the royalty, were extortionists. It was whispered in private conversations, but not printed in public media, that the nobility were infamous for requesting money and favours from village networks in the homeland and diaspora to bankroll the self-indulged lifestyles, festivities and funerals of the privileged while ignoring the reality that their people as a collective were poor. Lingering and festering at the bottom end of the Tongan hierarchy was the common person's belief that the nobility's inclusion in Tonga's legislative assembly gave this class-group of men an unrestricted license to abuse the liberties of the state as well as society.

Baron Fielakepa, Member of the Judicial Committee of Privy Council



The suggestion to get rid of the nobility alongside mistresses, concubines, wives, and hangers on had public appeal because it pointed out all kinds of uselessness supposedly occupying the top shelf in Tongan social stratification. Plainly it questioned, why do the masses put up with it? The solution was clearly noted; pest control by measure of eradicating the the country's social and economic parasites. In a complex way, it separated the royalty from the nobility by arguing that the monarch should remain under a revised role that better served democratisation of the state, but the nobility had to be permanently removed (Moala 2002, p. 296).

Like many other Tongans, particularly those who were recipients of a liberal education in Western universities, democracy from my experience as a New Zealand citizen was definitely at odds with a ruling class of landed gentry. I had figured that lords and ladies were the antithesis of social equality, a systematic obstruction to power sharing and the fair redistribution of meagre resources and limited opportunity in a developing economy. Assuming every single one was absurd, arrogant, greedy, and morally corrupt I despised them all.

As the class-group of men who collectively hold thirty per cent of landholdings in a small island nation, the Tongan nobility had status and power – political power and privilege in the parliamentary structure and organisation before the 2010 general election. They also had an economic advantage over ordinary citizens through the constitutional right to inherit estates and subsequently lease land for abodes, schools, businesses and cultivation as they saw fit. There was the odd noble like Nuku of Kolonga who doubled up as a farmer and agricultural exporter utilising his own landholdings and the collective growing power of small-scale farmers on his estate for business. However, most preferred to lease land for income and this frequently happened at a commercial and pricey rate.

Kalafi Moala proposed radical change in a class based Kingdom of royalty, nobility and commoners. He was the opening hard hitter of the 1990s, the inaugural critic of his generation who was too brutally honest for many a conservative Tongan palate. I surmised that he was either brave or reckless considering that speaking out against the power and authority of the old-guard had consequences for the common human being – one of those being the possibility of incarceration or exile. At that time in Tonga "provoking to anger a civil servant" was a criminal offence (Moala 2002, p. 17).

Moala himself became the subject of skewed political process in a top heavy state bureaucracy when in 1996 he was

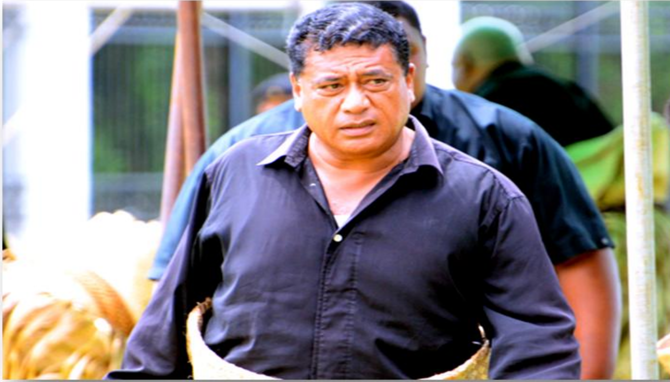
put on trial and jailed for thirty days by Tonga's legislative assembly for publishing a news item on one minister's impeachment. Serving twenty-six days of his jail sentence, Moala successfully appealed parliament's decision in court and won a moral victory for freedom of the press and politically, for the democratisation of state and society (Leilua 2012).

The twist was that ten years after Moala's book was released I published my own book through Moala's publishing company. He wrote the foreword. My first book built on to his original message and was called *Shoot the Messenger: The report on the Nuku'alofa reconstruction project and why the Government of Tonga dumped it* (2011, p. 22, p. 24).

> "...the parliamentary relationship between a Noble's Representative and a community, a district, a people, operates vaguely in democratic principle and practice because the voting public is a class group of thirty-one out of thirty-three estate and title holders.
>
> The key question is accountability to the people. How do the people hold the Nobles accountable for safeguarding and sustaining the quality of life on their estates? ...Notions of community service and social reciprocity are simply that; an accepted wisdom which has no legal framework to guarantee it is a sustainable development practice."

Although I was not imprisoned by the Tongan parliament, my outspoken personality did rile the prime minister of Tonga's office. The acting chief secretary sent me an email threatening court action for harassing the premier. To stamp his official authority on the intimidation strategy, the acting chief secretary copied into the correspondence Tonga's prime minister, who is also a noble and my mother's second cousin. The prime minister's chief secretary and the secretary to cabinet, who has since been suspended indefinitely by the Public Services Commission on April 5th 2012 (Prime Minister's Office 2012), was copied in too.

Lord Tu'ivakano, Prime Minister of Tonga



Pressuring an individual with court action was the singling out tactic that the government bureaucracy was known for playing over the dangerous people, the ordinary people (Mila 2005), the few who had dared to cross boundaries in a small society by criticising the state hierarchy and exposing its systematic flaws and uncured sores. A colleague of mine was verbally threatened by a Tongan diplomat for publishing an opinion piece condemning the Government of Tonga's 2009 management of the state owned ferry that sank and killed 74 people.

In 2012 a democratically elected Government of Tonga proposed to bring in a freedom of information policy (Ministry of Information and Communications 2012a). Contradicting this, a journalist for the Tongan language newspaper *Talaki* received a stern warning from government officials for publishing an article on my February 27th 2012 book release in Auckland, New Zealand. The information was taken directly from the AUT University website from which the original English version was translated into the Tongan language (AUT University 2012). In addition, a Tongan broadcaster was questioned and cautioned for publicly announcing on a radio

show my book's release and detail on its content. There were murmurs among the independent Tongan media that any consignment of books from Auckland, New Zealand, entering the border for sale in Tonga would be stopped by customs officers and confiscated.

The ten year period from Moala's first book and mine had not shifted the critical enquiry we had sought answers to, specifically, why is Tonga a weak democratic state that fails to practice good governance and strengthen civic society? In that decade, something odd had happened to the opposition party in parliament, which supposedly represented the common people. The watchdog in the House, 'Akilisi Pohiva, had gone quiet and some, including myself, surmised that there was a certain degree of collusion between the leaders of the opposition – the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands – and government. Considering that two cabinet ministers out of twelve were members of the Democratic Party, there was bound to be some kind of co-dependency playing out across oppositional politics in the present coalition government.

If there was an answer then it came to light in the adage that something has got to give. An imbalance of power kept playing out in the political system. If the overburdened weight and economic cost that the privileged few at the top lumbered on the masses holding up the system at the bottom was not assessed, something in the structure would cave in and collapse. That something in the structure which might give out was on both counts, in Moala's book and mine, the nobility.

Ma'afu's word is in the hills

Ma'afu's word is in the hills (2004, p. 3) was Spurway's article unravelling the part that a Tongan chief Ma'afu, the Tui Lau, played in the 1874 cession of Fiji to the British Empire. Recorded in nineteenth century history as the main contender to rival against chief Cakobau of Bau for paramount

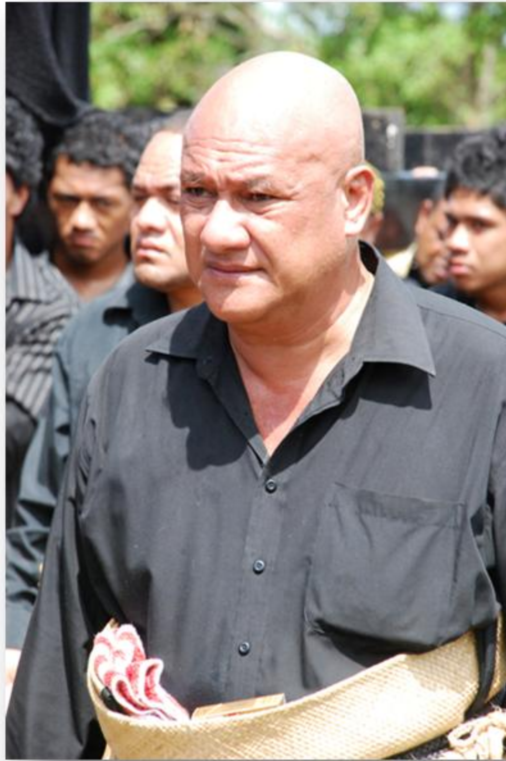
chieftainship over the Fiji islands, he stood against Fiji's territorial cession to Britain. Ma'afu did not support the handover of political power.

There was a mix of factors prompting his predicament. Tongan and Christian, Ma'afu was exiled from Tonga as a young man, compelling him to migrate and occupy the Lau group in southern Fiji. He was also well-known for having many women and progeny. The twists and turns of his lifetime saw Ma'afu, as an old man, reluctantly come to terms with the fact that Fiji had become a British colony and that his role in the colonial administration was that of an official. *Ma'afu's word is in the hills* evokes that his word had honour, and that this Tongan chief's position would remain unchanged in the face of the political environment around him shifting into a new era.

> The outcome, an offer by the chiefs of Fiji to cede their islands to Britain, witnesses the end of Ma'afu's wider ambitions and indeed occasioned a severe humiliation for him as he manoeuvred to preserve his power in Lau in the face of Fijian attempts finally to expel him from his adopted home. Only his grudging acceptance of the inevitable, an acceptance which meant the abandonment of his long-held opposition to British control, enabled him to end his career as an official of the new British administration.

The estate of Ma'afu in the Kingdom of Tonga is sizeable and located in the central district of Tongatapu, the largest island of one hundred and seventy six atolls. It has two villages, Vaini and Tokomololo. Moreover, the noble Ma'afu occupies considerable status among the nobility as the head of the Ha'a Havea Lahi, the largest and oldest confederation of nobles, villages and clans. Ha'a Havea Lahi constitutes the Nobles Ma'afu, Lavaka, Vaea, Fielakepa, Tu'ivakano, Fohe and Lasike. From this collective of seven titles and estates, the Lavaka title formerly belonged to the monarch Tupou VI before he began his reign in March 2012. The Fohe title has yet to be appointed by the reigning King.

Lord Ma’afu, Minister for Lands and Environment



In oral and documented accounts of history, it has been said that Ma’afu is connected to the warlord and paramount chief of Lau in Fiji. In many ways, the house of Ma’afu is likened to the Ma’afu who resettled in Lau, Fiji, by being characterised as militant, disciplined, resistant to outside intervention, and loyal to upholding Tongan rank and order.

In present-day Tonga, the current holder of the Ma’afu title and estate has a contrasting public reputation. He was a former military officer for Tonga Defence Services and was an

aide de camp and private secretary to the late King Tupou IV who died in 2006. In 2008, Ma'afu moved into politics as one of parliament's nine nobles' representatives, and in 2009 was appointed by the former government administration as the minister for environment and climate change. Tonga's 2010 general election saw Ma'afu re-elected by his class peers as a nobles' representative for Tongatapu. Since 2011, he has been a senior cabinet minister in Tonga's first fully elected government holding the large portfolio of lands, survey, natural resources, environment and climate change. According to constitutional law, the minister for lands portfolio must be afforded to a noble's representative in parliament. Ma'afu is ranked third in the cabinet line up after the deputy prime minister and the prime minister.

On the flip side of the record, he is renowned for having many love affairs. Even in later life, Ma'afu makes the Tongan gossip circles for being married but having affairs resulting in children. One previous relationship, in particular, was published about by journalist Paul Raffaele in his book, *Among the Cannibals: Adventures on the Trail of Man's Darkest Ritual* (2008, pp. 164-165). The author's social imagery of Tonga creates an illustrious noble Ma'afu, a controversial figure among the who's who of "polite society." In this small island society, Christianity and sexual morality mould social values where open infidelity and illegitimate offspring are scornfully looked down upon.

> I know something of Mele Vikatolia Faletau. She is the star of one of Tonga's most notorious love affairs. ...Mele was married with three children when she left her husband, the king's nephew, and moved in with one of Tonga's nobles, Ma'afu, a handsome, shaven-headed, hawk-eyed soldier, descendant of a famously bellicose warlord. It is a tangled affair, because Mele was married to Prine Mailefihi, son of the King's brother, Prince Tui'pelehake, while Ma'afu was married to Princess Taone, sister of Mailefihi. Mele and her prince are divorced, but Ma'afu is still married to the princess, even though he lives with Mele, and Fina tells me the *fakaleiti* gossip has it that he has had a child with her.

> The affair is rarely mentioned in polite society in Tonga, and never in the media, but everyone knows about it.

Presently, the noble Ma'afu is in a defacto relationship with a different woman from the commoner class who is much younger than him. Again, this has resulted in illegitimate offspring and public condemnation. 'Akilisi Pohiva, the leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, slammed the noble's lifestyle as "sexual immorality," denouncing him as clearly unfit to lead a government ministry (Miller 2011). Pohiva is also a patrilineal uncle to Ma'afu.

> There is [sic] no moral guidelines as you normally see practiced by cabinet members of most democratic countries. No wonder why members are just doing whatever they want to do. There is [sic] no guidelines to keep us free from sexual immorality. There is one Minister who is a noble, he is living in a defacto relationship and yet he was appointed to become one of the leaders. This kind of immoral behaviour is not needed especially if you are a leader of a department. It is also an abuse of taxpayers trust.

My point is two-fold. Firstly, the democratisation of Tonga's state by no means entails the liberalisation of society; expressly, that society would develop a liberal view of sexual relationships outside of legal marriage and the crossing of class boundaries in which members of the upper stratum are permitted to conduct affairs with whomever they choose and vis a vis. There still exists the social belief that people are bounded by class. The mixing of class groups is policed and guarded by conservative restrictions on marriage deciding who is allowed to be intimate and reproduce with whom. This is the baseline principle of social and political control in which the authority, power and land owning rights of the royalty and nobility are kept within certain families.

Transgressions take place, and not without public outcries and social consequences such as being driven out from mixing in certain circles. The complex nature of treacherous sexual

liaisons in a small island society is that the common people, the people from below, are the ones doing the policing of above and what goes on in private lives. In turn, they finger point at members of the elite branded in public with “sexual immorality” (Miller 2011).

The truth about Ma’afu’s infamous reputation for having children out of wedlock to numerous sexual partners is that it is only of public concern and up for scathing disparagement because he is a noble, and of late, a cabinet minister. If he were a commoner there would be little, if any, fuss made about the history and frequency of his sexual relationships. As a corollary, the fact that Ma’afu is male and a noble allows him an amount of social and sexual freedom that is not afforded to women of the landed gentry. Women, whatever their social status and rank in Tongan society, are contemptuously attacked and in some cases punished for sexual affairs out of wedlock, especially those that produce illegitimate offspring.

My second point, which is mutually entailed by the first, is that the binary opposition constructed about Ma’afu’s public and private life – a high ranking noble and senior cabinet minister versus a mature male of the elite social class who is a notorious womaniser – objectifies him as a human being. Ma’afu is created through a social imaginary to resemble a thing, an object, the target, and the subject of other people’s value judgements; one that is spoken about in disapproving language without permitting the thing being discussed to be a real person with emotions, memories, intellect, reasoning, and feelings, who can speak and think for himself.

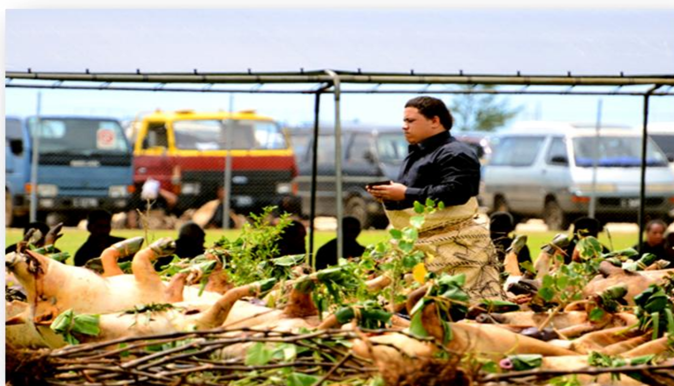
As Gayatri Spivak examined in her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), the answer is no; the object of dialogue is also the subject of scrutiny that does not speak for himself or herself. Rather, the subaltern is spoken about by others who assume the authoritative role of knowing all about this item, this thing of talk and enquiry. Consequently, the subaltern is dehumanised; that is, made less of a human being, or even worse, rendered inhuman due to the unequal

power relations of being represented in public media by others and their estimations of this person's life and worth.[1]

Reforming tradition

The death of King George Tupou V in Hong Kong on March 18th 2012, and the proceedings of his state funeral held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, on Tuesday March 27th set off disagreement and debate. The bone of contention was that the monarch lay in state at the Royal Palace for one night before burial, and that the period of state mourning was shortened to four days after the burial, a total of ten days including the pre and post burial periods. There was political reform in the democratisation of the state. The pressing anxiety was did that amount to cultural reform in the altering of tradition? For the late King, his successor and his family, it did.

Taumafa Kava – Kava Ceremony for King Tupou VI, Tonga's New Head of State



Princess Pilolevu, the only sister of King George Tupou V, stated in an interview with 3 News, New Zealand, that it was the late monarch's wish to lie in state for one day and for a shortened bereavement period (Morrah 2012). Tonga's

struggling economy in a global downturn, compounded by the costliness of a state funeral, were contributing factors to the modification of tradition.

> This is the way he wished to go, quickly and away from Tonga to cause minimum damage and minimum harm to the economy and to the people of Tonga. Yes, certainly, he emphasised to both Tupou the VI and myself years ago, a few years ago, that when it came to his time, keep everything simple. But of course as you've seen it's very difficult for us Tongans to simplify things. But we all did our best, and I'm sure he would have been happy with the results.

Leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, 'Akilisi Pohiva, attested to the burden of money worries and climbing national debt in a small island developing state. The expense of a state funeral coupled with a prolonged period of state mourning at a time when Tonga's economy is crippled and its fledgling democracy is weak could, as he saw it, trigger civil unrest (Field 2012).

> Member of parliament 'Akilisi Pohiva said yesterday that Tongans will be alarmed over "the enormous costs" of a royal funeral on top of a scheduled royal wedding and now a coronation. "I don't think the government can face this," he said. Mr Pohiva said he did not believe civil disorder was immediately likely but the tone could quickly change. "There is a lot of concern about the deteriorating economy and, if it gets worse, then we don't know what will happen."

Previous state funerals for King Tafau'ahau Tupou IV in 2006 and Queen Salote Tupou III in 1965 had a state mourning period of one hundred days, including two days for the lying in state of the monarch at the Royal Palace in Nuku'alofa. Moreover, both monarchs died in Auckland, New Zealand, where they laid in state before returning to Tonga so that the overseas communities in New Zealand and Australia had an opportunity to pay their respect. For older Tongan migrants resettled in New Zealand and Australia, the nostalgia

of the past – Tonga as they remember it in days gone by – prompted outcries against the ruling class for changing tradition without consulting the people.

Rosie Topui, a migrant Tongan woman living in Melbourne, Australia, spoke out strongly that the state funeral was "rushed." The hurried proceedings had "denied" overseas Tongans the time needed to travel back to Tonga for the actual burial on Tuesday March 27th (Hill 2012).

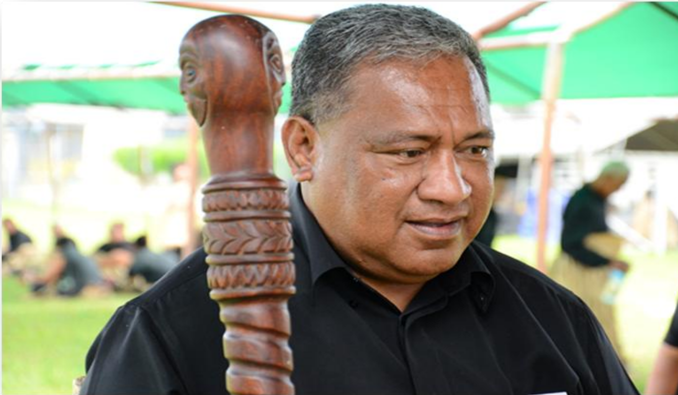
> I personally am concerned because this is unprecedented Bruce, what has happened, they rushed through with these arrangements because it's never been done like that before. My concern for the Tongans here – most of them are confused – they're angry, they're disappointed and they're greatly saddened. Quite a number of Tongans here wanted to get to Tonga to be there for the royal funeral are denied that because first they said it was going to be on the 28th, burial, and on the 26th, the body of the King will be in Tonga. And to us that is so – we don't understand. There is no explanation that's given to the public about it – why this hurried burial? And then, to say on the next day that instead of the 28th it's now the 27th, that is even worse. You can imagine people are in shock and most of them are sad because they can't make it to Tonga.

Topui pushed her discussion further claiming that tradition had to be maintained according to the protocol set out under previous state funerals because this is what was expected. Added to this, was her belief that it was the role of parliament and government to maintain tradition. Her rationale was that this is what the common people want, and so it should be done (Hill 2012).

> What they should have done this time is to follow the tradition. Follow the tradition of taking his body to New Zealand so that he can lie in state in New Zealand like his father before him and his grandmother before him. …And then for his body to be transported to Tonga and to lie in state for a week after the embalmment, even respectably four to five days, not just arrive there on the Monday and be buried on Tuesday now, not Wednesday. The whole point of government is there to

> listen to the people. They are the voice of the people. It’s the common people who put them in government. But I don’t think they have real power there and this is why there’s tugs of war, eventually even the parliamentarians can be talked into, persuaded to do this, that and the other. There are very few people in Tonga who would stand up for what they feel is right, and proclaim what they feel to be right. Unfortunately, even the parliament and perhaps those in high office – the Premier and all that – they don’t have any real power. This is why there needs to be a proper democracy.

Lauaki, Matapule for Talafo’ou



Topui’s emotively driven argument is tangled in the idea that politics and tradition are one and the same. Her opinion as a migrant Tongan woman residing in Australia is simply that; a point of view that by no means represents a sweeping consensus of Tongans living in the diasporic settlements of New Zealand, Australia and the USA. It is a perspective, nevertheless, that reflects the speaker’s situated identity; an older generation migrant geographically detached from the homeland who has direct memory of the Kingdom of Tonga under the rule of previous monarchs before George Tupou V,

namely his father Tafa'ahau Tupou IV and his paternal grandmother Salote Tupou III.

Social memory has shaped the speaker's understanding of tradition, in this instance, where any alteration to one's romanticised recollection of Tonga is a spurious imitation of real culture. There is a significant juncture in the speaker's dialogue where politics and tradition, which are now seen to be separate and distinct in Tonga's democratised state and society, are conflated. Topui's sentiments were that the Prime Minister of Tonga, the government as national executive, and the parliament as the country's legislature, have been charged with the civic duty of preserving tradition and culture for the common people.

The assumption is that this is what the overall Tongan population want from political leaders and parliamentary representatives. Underpinning this notion is the elision of geographical and political borders between Tongans in the homeland and Tongans overseas. Migrant Tongans resettled in Australia and New Zealand, according to the speaker, have the same right as the people living in Tonga to demand that the preservation of tradition is upheld by the state.

Sefita Hao'uli, an older generation migrant Tongan male residing in Auckland, New Zealand, voiced the counterpoint to Topui's stand. Democratisation meant "not to dwell in the past." Moving from an absolute monarchy towards a democratic state and society would entail more changes with the new King Tupou VI. Notably, Hao'uli cautioned that Tonga's fledgling democracy was weak and subject to further instability with the leadership changeover of the monarch and head of state (Hao'uli 2012).

> In my view, this form of conservatism runs counter to the prevailing wish of the "subjects" for accelerated political change ... and what I see as the response from the ruling class lately, the speeding up of democratisation and the willing of G5 [King George Tupou V] to relinquish his monarchical powers. T6 [King Tupou VI] within days of taking over has overtly

> tipped his hat in the same way. ...It is early days yet and this monarch is likely to be actively involved for the next two decades or so, but I'm heartened by what I've seen so far in that the changes on their own signals a wish not to dwell in the past. But let's give it time because we could also be heading into an era of turmoil where the pendulum can swing wildly from day to day.

Hao'uli's analogy of Tonga's social and political life being a swinging pendulum that could vary from one day to the next was reiterated in the analyses of mainstream New Zealand media. Political correspondent, Selwyn Manning, emphasised that Tonga's leadership transition with the new monarch's ascendance to the throne had created "a situation of uncertainty" (Williams 2012a).

> The King George Tupou V, he passed away last Sunday and what it has done is once again put Tonga into a situation of uncertainty. ...Tonga is kind of waiting and kind of looking and trying to assess exactly what to expect in the next couple of years. ...Yes, if the pace of change is arrested, and you've got to remember in this Pacific Island state pace of change is very considered and from a New Zealand or Australian point of view, quite slow; if it slows in any way or it alters its course, yeah, you can tell that there will be another signal, whether that be political or civil, that a crisis would develop.

Convergent with the forecast given by 'Akilisi Pohiva, leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, Manning calculated that if further democratisation to the state system was disallowed by the monarch, political and civil unrest could ensue (Williams 2012a). The discussions of Pohiva and Manning make connections to the 2006 civil servants strike. On Thursday November 16th in 2006, pro-democracy protesting and an agitated crowd swiftly got out of control. There erupted violence, rioting, and the burning of eighty per cent of Nuku'alofa, Tonga's capital and central business district, causing the death of eight young men.

Two significant points which are silenced in New Zealand media – the overseas news network that transmits the most extensive and regular coverage of Tonga's current events compared to other countries – have emerged from the 2006 riots. Firstly, Tonga's 118 million pa'anga loan from the EXIM Bank of China for the reconstruction of Nuku'alofa was first signed in 2007 under the former Prime Minister Sevele's administration. This borrowing eventuated *because* the capital and central business district had been violently and wilfully destroyed by protesters, rioters and looters.

Secondly, 'Akilisi Pohiva and the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands are quick to condemn the government loan from the EXIM Bank of China for being the catalyst of Tonga's rising national debt and monetary woes. However, Pohiva and fellow member of parliament for the Democratic Party, 'Isileli Pulu, who is the Minister for Commerce and Tourism in this Tu'ivakano government, had the charge of seditious conspiracy brought against them for their alleged involvement in the 2006 riots. Another cabinet minister of government, Clive Edwards, the Minister for Justice and Public Revenue, faced a charge of speaking seditious words in association with the riots (Dorney 2009).

Although the Court of Appeal dismissed the charges, the association between civil disorder and politicians of the day stirs public anxiety as to whether Pohiva's talk of civil unrest signals that in fact, the party he leads accepts that violent political protest can act as a means to justify an ends, such as the situation in 2006 has evidenced. Pohiva himself has never publicly announced that violent political protest causing damage to property and physical harm to state and society will not be tolerated by the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands. His position has shown ambivalence.

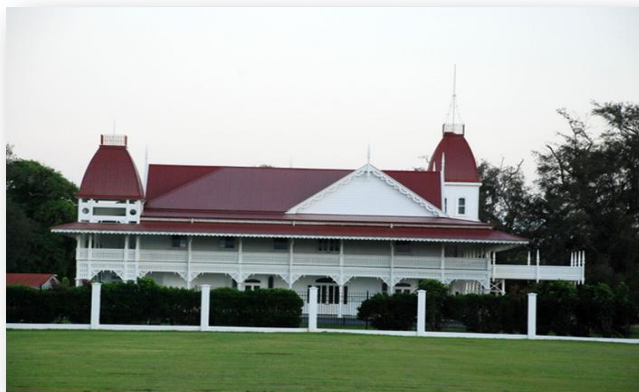
Sangsta Saulala, another member of parliament for the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands also had a charge brought against him, and later dismissed, for seditious conspiracy in the 2006 riots. The twist is Saulala confidently

asserted to New Zealand media that Tonga's democracy served as an exemplar model for peaceful change to the state's political organisation (Radio New Zealand International 2012c).

> Tonga is becoming one of the examples to other countries that change can happen in a peaceful way. Democracy in some countries, people die for it, and all this protest and violence but in Tonga the King gave his authority and power to the people.

His social memory had given him license to selectively edit the facts of how change was affected by violence and destruction to property responsible for the deaths of eight Tongan citizens. The twist gets knotty when Saulala elects to acknowledge the late King George Tupou V as the reformer, the instigator, the orchestrator of Tonga's democracy, who voluntarily "gave his authority and power to the people" (Radio New Zealand International 2012c). As one of the twelve men elected to parliament for 'Akilisi Pohiva's party which alleges to be democratic and of the people, why are ordinary Tongans invisible in Saulala's version of history from above, not history from below? (Sharp 1991).

Royal Palace, Refurbished by the EXIM Bank of China Loan



It was Sefita Hao'uli who said "let's give it time because we could also be heading into an era of turmoil where the pendulum can swing wildly from day to day" (Hao'uli 2012). He was referring to the head of state changeover from King Tupou George V to King Tupou VI. The reality check, if truth be told, is that the swinging pendulum of political instability also points to the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, the divergent views put across from its members of parliament, and the fact that 'Akilisi Pohiva, whose opinions vary from certain factions of the party membership, as the sole political contest for the premiership, the leadership of government.

The Kingdom of Tonga, the youngest democracy of the South Pacific Islands, does not possess the leadership selection and diverse range of political ideologies evident in established democracies; nor has Tonga's first past the post general electoral system, compounded by stigmatising beliefs about gender and youth, adequately nurtured women and young people to develop as political leaders and contenders for power.

Culture of democratisation

This period of reform with a new parliamentary arrangement has fostered a culture of democratisation context specific to Tonga. Propelling the rationale for more remodelling is the link made to Tonga's fiscal demise and rising national debt. Theoretically, democratic institutions will rescue Tonga from drowning in poverty. Sangsta Saulala of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands and people's representative for the constituency, Tongatapu 7, confirmed this idea. Saulala averred that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association with 189 member states "will be more willing to help the Tongan economy if they can see the country is moving towards democracy" (Radio New Zealand International 2012b, 2012c).

Reality reveals that this has not eventuated – Tonga is not trading to overseas markets in agriculture and fisheries despite changes to the legislature – and it is unlikely the

simplistic notion that democracy saves the economy will happen. The argument in favour of a parliamentary democracy whereby all members are elected by citizens registered on the general role is traced to the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands. Contrastingly, challengers who express a different outlook go largely unnoticed and unrecorded.

'Akilisi Pohiva's Democratic Party is getting across a highly charged message tightly knitted into the regional politics and popular media of New Zealand, Australia and the USA and has therefore, won favour. The western realm of developed countries share collective security interests in containing South Pacific states under their hegemony, away from the direct influence of China, India and the Arab Middle East. Full democracy, in this sense, is western-euro centric. It means to distinguish Tonga's parliamentary system as satisfactorily aligned with western political ideology.

Edward Said analysed the predominant influence of western media in colouring and domineering how outsiders make sense of developing countries (Said 1981). The "so called independent media in a liberal society" carries and conveys its own country's political and economic interests when reporting on the situations, events and people that it believes characterises this foreign country, this developing country, which is only salvageable if it can make itself more like us, in the west.

> The so called independent media in a liberal society like this, in effect, are so lazy and are so controlled by interests that are commercial and political at the same time, that there is no investigative reporting. It's just basically repeating the line of government. (Said cited in Jhally 2005, p. 9).

In everyday Tongan life, "cultural practices" deemed as unaffordable, living above family means, and squandering away humble household incomes are seen as contributing factors to debt and financial strife. While cultural practices

include a host of activities such as church donations, church conferences, weddings, birthdays, baptisms, funerals and school and family reunions, it was King George Tupou V's state funeral that became the focal point for reforming tradition, downsizing the cost of culture, and questioning whether, in this age of democratisation, royal family events should remain the taxpayers' obligation.

Leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, 'Akilisi Pohiva, was quick off the mark to argue that such "cultural practices" were a liability to "savings." The bottom line was that ordinary Tongans did not save enough from their incomes to be financially secure; thus, transferring the cost of "family events" to extended kinfolk, and in turn, escalating collective deficit (Tahana 2012). The criticism embedded in this dialogue is that royal family events are the origins of excessive tradition passing on cost and debt to firstly, the nobility which is the social collective connected to their class group and secondly, further afield to the state and citizens.

> "Cultural practices that placed the burden of paying for family events on the wider family hindered savings," Mr Pohiva said.

Pohiva saw that King Tupou VI presented the political inroad for adjusting parliamentary organisation to achieve his party's agenda that Tonga would attain a fully democratised electoral system. Putting one and one together, he predicted that the new monarch would be suitable for Tonga's political development given that he made good on the ideology that the common people, not the nobility, would have control over running the government (Tahana 2012).

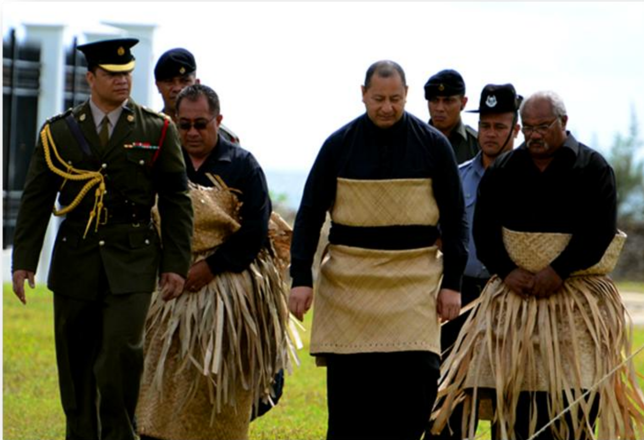
> "The implication ... in the meeting was he wants the people to take the leadership. I think he will make a good King."

Deputy leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, Dr Sitiveni Halapua, commented that the

relinquishing of monarchical power which took effect during the reign of the late King George Tupou V had not reduced the "apex," or the authority of the crown, to approve or refuse new laws that had been passed in the legislature (Fonua 2012b).

> Looking at the structure of Tonga's new government with the Monarch at the apex, over the Cabinet, the Legislative Assembly, and the judiciary, he said the highlight of Tonga's political reform was the surrendering by the monarch of its executive power to an elected Cabinet and Legislative Assembly, but apart from that, the monarch at the apex still retained a lot of power. Sitiveni said that the veto power of the king was questioned; "but we proposed for the king to retain its veto power as a check and balance mechanism. He exercised this veto relating to the amendment to the Firearms and Ammunition Act which was passed by the House." The late King George Tupou V's veto was publicly acclaimed.

King Tupou VI, Tonga's New Head of State

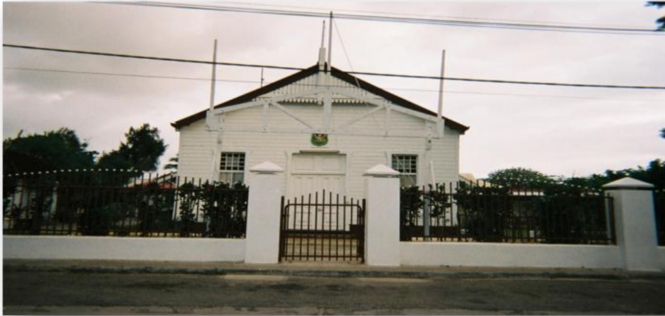


Here, the leaders of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands have figured that expanding democratic reform, in particular, changing the method by which the nine nobles'

representatives are elected to the legislative assembly, is dependent on winning King Tupou VI's approval that this has to become state law. Instead of focusing on gaining the general voting public's consensus that this is what the twelve constituencies represented by Democratic Party members of parliament want to pursue, Pohiva and Halapua have "upped the ante," to coin a gambling term used in poker. By this, Pohiva and Halapua have gone straight to the top, downplaying the overused and under practiced notions of transparency and accountability to the people of Tonga. The political strategy, which is a gamble, seeks to gain support from the "apex" – the monarch – over and above conducting public consultation on a draft bill to put through the legislature.

The interpretation of democratic process is that "his party," 'Akilisi Pohiva's Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, wants this change to take effect. The next step, therefore, is to appeal to the King at the "apex." The rationale is that "the buck stops here." This was US President Harry Truman's trademark saying in politics, meaning that responsibility does not pass beyond this point because the head of state has the final say (McCullough 1992). Contrary to Pohiva and Halapua's starry-eyed ideal that democracy is for the people, what their politics show is that the people at the bottom are without decision making power over what becomes Tongan law: Really, what the King says, goes (Tahana 2012).

Fale Alea – Parliament of Tonga



> Mr Pohiva wants to introduce a bill in the remainder of the four-year term to enable Tongans to vote for the nine noble seats, as an interim step towards full democracy. "It's not easy for the nobles to give up their power. The Tongan people were not expecting a noble to be our first Prime Minister of our new government. People are not happy because we've been struggling for more than 30 years for the people to take the leadership for the people." ...The constitution allows for a vote of confidence to be taken after the first 18 months of a four-year term. That threshold is about to be passed. Mr Pohiva said his party hadn't discussed calling for a vote when Parliament resumed in May, but it was a possibility.

Stating that the "people are not happy" with a noble being the elected premier is not an accurate report of Tongan public opinion. This type of speech is fashioned to bait and hook the New Zealand media, a political pitch to gain backing from an overseas audience that 'Akilisi Pohiva is the better choice of leader "for the people." Whether the majority of the voting public really support Pohiva as the preferred leader of government is secondary to the fact that this is a seasoned politician who has spent twenty six years in parliament, and is skilful at manoeuvring the New Zealand media into toeing the line that his voice alone speaks "for the people" (Magnall 2012).

The truth is a political leadership dearth exists in Tonga. There are no other strong candidates for power from an opposition party in the legislature. In this two-man competition – Lord Tu'ivakano versus 'Akilisi Pohiva – the convenient binary opposition the New Zealand media are guilty of over-investing in is that of the privileged noble versus the people's underdog. The actors written into this Tongan scoop have more to do with feeding the non-Tongan imaginary – how Tonga is imagined into existence by observers and outsiders – than what it has to do with real people and the brutal, bullying, coercive, masculine politics of patriarchy and hierarchy in a small island developing state.

Pohiva and Halapua's dual leadership has not engineered greater democratic process and social inclusion in Tongan politics and society. Despite Halapua's claim that he is a researcher of the *talanoa* process, a term for using dialogue as a means to resolve conflict in small island developing states, dialogue aimed at bringing about equity and participatory democracy across class, gender and age groups has not taken off on a national scale or in parliament (Halapua 2008; SGI Quarterly 2012). By contrast, this partnership has replicated the static convention of older male status, hierarchy and rank. These markers of political identity are the cultural norm among the members and supporters of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands.

Does this political party proportionately represent women and young people as constituency candidates and members of parliament? Within the organisational structure of the party have women and young people been elected or appointed as officers in areas representing collective interests, specific to their gender and age group? Importantly, if the party were to take government office by winning a parliamentary vote of no confidence in the premier and effectively removing the prime minister and cabinet, then what is the overarching plan for mobilising the economy plus bringing about greater equality

and fairer access to resources across class, gender and age groups?

Sitiveni Halapua, deputy leader for the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, states that his "main concern is our debt crisis." With a PhD in economics specialising in monetary theory, his concern with the country's debt is understandable. It could be reasonably expected that balancing what a developing country owes compared to what it produces is part of his higher degree expertise.

> My main concern is our debt crisis which amounts to 45% of our Gross Domestic Product. This means that for every pa'anga you produce, 45 seneti goes to paying off public debt."

There are two inconsistencies with Halapua's "concern" over Tonga's "debt crisis." Firstly, he and Pohiva are not focused on controlling national debt and stabilising the balance of payments by overseas trade. The Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands has not provided an economic development plan to accelerate trade exports; nor has the party critiqued the government's fiscal strategies for managing debt. Secondly, the political attack on the country's economy has targeted the former government of Feleti Sevele, 2006 – 2010, of which the current prime minister, Lord Tu'ivakano and two cabinet ministers, Lord Ma'afu and Lisiate 'Akolo, were part. The convoluted logic is that the Sevele administration was responsible for taking out the EXIM Bank of China loan to rebuild Tonga's capital destroyed by civil rioting. Thus, the former regime is answerable for the country's "debt crisis," despite the fact that the Sevele government is no longer in power, and in respect that if Nuku'alofa was not burned to the ground there would be no bank loan resulting in debt.

The omitted evidence is that the Tu'ivakano government of 2010 – 2014 is not, in fact, making loan repayments to the EXIM Bank of China for borrowing 118 million pa'anga.

Repayments are made over a twenty year period that commences in 2014, once this administration's four year term is finished (Brown Pulu 2011, pp. 75-77). Presently, the government is paying off the principal on the loan which amounts to approximately 1 million pa'anga per annum until 2014.

A large proportion of the state budget is spent on salaries in the public sector. Efficiency in relation to value for dollar points to downsizing staff numbers across all ministries, departments and divisions. An under-emphasised outcome of the 2006 civil servants strike is that public sector salary increases took effect. Compounding this, Tonga's export trade is at an all time low; agricultural and fisheries exports have rapidly diminished. The stark fiscal consequence is that the state cannot afford to remunerate salaries to an oversized bureaucracy where payments are higher than what the market economy determines. One response to a *Matangi Tonga Online* article made this observation clear (Matangi Tonga Online 2012b).

> I think it would be absurd to dispute the importance of job creation is [sic] for our economy. Bills like this only increase costs of businesses, which put [sic] more pressure on cutting costs such as jobs and discourages businesses from hiring as employees wages are now 5% higher. With wages now set higher than what market forces would naturally set, it increases unemployment. And, as an employee I'm sure others out there may have the same view, have no plans or cannot afford to give up 5% of their income to the NRBF, or perhaps even thinking [sic] about retirement. There are other ways to put money aside for one's own retirement, at least let the individual choose whether they want to be part of the scheme or not...

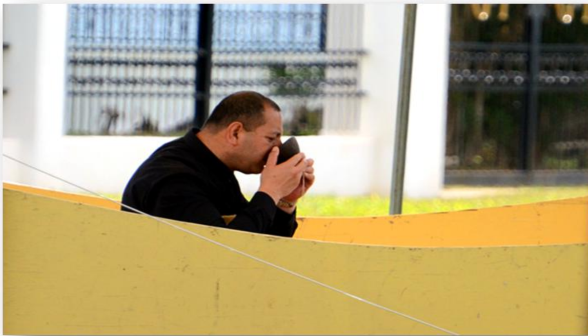
The respondent's take on democracy is that employees should be given the choice as to whether they wished to contribute to the National Retirement Board Fund or not. Mandatory membership authorised by state law and policy gave employees no option to opt out due to costliness.

Compulsory retirement savings plans for both public and private sector employees are routine in developed economies and democracies. The underlying tone is that Tonga’s employment market is weak and jobs are in short supply. Furthermore, job creation in the private sector is hampered by a national salary scale that the dismal market economy cannot meet the expense of. This discussion raises conversations and concerns of everyday life. The critical inquiry is why are questions that are relevant to strengthening a consistent information flow between the state and civic society not taken up by government and parliamentarians?

The problem is not tradition but transformation

It was Michel Foucault who analysed the affect that historical disjuncture has had on how people conceptualise and speak about discontinuity. What he meant was that it is not tradition that poses the problem for forward movement in human history. Rather, it is transformation. When a society, a population bounded by national and geographic borders, stops doing certain practices in favour of progress – whether that be interpreted as economic advancement or social improvement – it is awkward, difficult and emotionally taxing for people to come to grips with fracture, rupture, breakage, disjuncture, discontinuity from the past (Foucault 1972, p. 7).

King Tupou VI, Tonga’s New Head of State

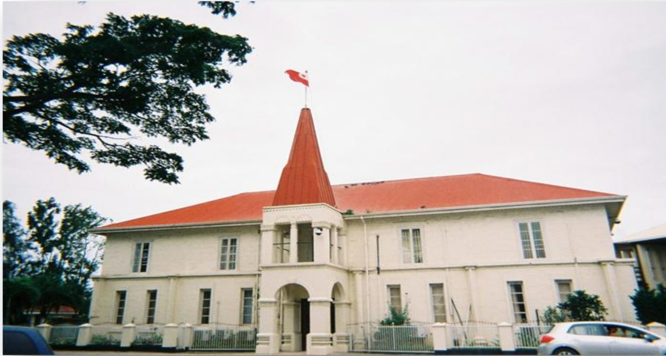


> The problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations. What one is seeing then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions, some of which are already familiar, by which this new form of history is trying to develop its own theory: how is one to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of discontinuity (threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation)?

Foucault's sentiments resound amidst Tonga's social landscape, the "predicament of culture" when democratisation involves shifting the mindset of society and how class, gender and age groups think and relate to each other (Clifford 1988). It is simply not practicable to introduce a new structure for the state to operate under and to assume it will *naturally* work without sufficiently informing people how it works differently from the past system, and why it is a marked improvement.

What has transpired is that the traditional gatekeepers of power and authority – the late monarch, his successor and the royal family – have transitioned into the new era mindful of Tonga's need to downsize the expense of the state funeral in response to the country's weakening economic performance. By contrast, the extent of Tongan opinion at home and overseas intersects on one point – ambiguity. The commoners occupy common ground through their characterisation of one's class-group in a highly stratified society, whether that position is political by opposing the nobility leading the government, or cultural by lamenting traditions of the past that are obsolete in the present. Ordinary people are having difficulty transforming their collective ideology; ideology in the Marxist sense of a power struggle (Nelson and Grossberg 1988). Class consciousness grapples with newness and difference that can travel beyond borders of cultural conservatism and the social convention of us, the people, against them, the ruling elite (Dupre 1980).

Prime Minister of Tonga’s Office



Transforming the political structure of Tonga has, perhaps inadvertently, alienated the nobility. It is no class secret that a traditionalist faction among the nobles did not support democratic reform. Anxiety was centred on the Land Act (1988, Revised Edition) and the fear that Tonga’s land law may be repealed. If traditional tenure was phased out by privatising the sale of land to foreigners, then large portions of the country’s small landmass could be owned by non-Tongans. Support for the former government led by Feleti Sevele to orchestrate legislative changes to the parliamentary arrangement came about because democratisation was the express wish of the late King George Tupou V (Brown Pulu 2011, p. 21). As a collective, the nobility consented to reform on the understanding that the nine nobles’ representative seats in the legislature were to remain permanently fixed and unchanged.

For the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands to push further amendment to parliamentary organisation by moving a private members bill allowing voters on the general roll to elect nine nobles’ representatives is undemocratic by the manner in which the process for amendment is being executed as well as the underlying intent. There has been no formal public

consultation to gain fair comment on how such a bill will be received by the general population. Moreover, dialogue between the peoples' representatives and the nobles' representatives on a private members bill has not taken place, purposely disallowing the nobility from voicing concern or disagreement.

Explicitly, the proposed bill is a road block strategy. Pohiva's unease is how to prevent the nobles from contesting for the premiership. The leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands was bitterly disappointed at not being elected prime minister from within the legislative assembly in 2010. He blamed parliament's independent members for splitting the vote of the peoples' representatives by electing the noble prime minister (Tahana 2012).

In political terms, the independent parliamentarians were the balance of power; the way in which they voted decided the premier's election. Pohiva has made his position known: The role of Prime Minister and the running of government must go to the peoples' representatives, not the nobles' representatives. The unresolved matter is why should the nine noble parliamentarians representing a class group of thirty three titles and estates, which collectively, amounts to thirty per cent of the country's landholdings *not* be permitted to compete for the prime minister's role? How would this exclusionary measure limiting the calibre and experience of candidates for government leadership strengthen Tonga's democracy (Campbell 2011)?

Pohiva's leadership agenda is problematic for the democratic organisation of the Tongan state. Pushing for voters on the general roll to elect the nine nobles' representatives to parliament could, if unchecked and unchallenged, weaken the politics of minority representation, opposition, diversity and coalition government, which are cornerstones of parliamentary democracy in the twenty first century. There is a risk that the slanted media treatment of Pohiva's bill, which is seen as a move towards the Western

interpretation of full democracy, will brainwash the voting public to go along with this self-perpetuating prophecy bereft of exercising the democratic right to ask questions and seek critical information on compromises, options and choices.

The insidious danger is that the voting public may be a captive audience easily indoctrinated by the media obsession with 'Akilisi Pohiva as the "champion of democracy" to elect nobles who conform with, and align themselves to, the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands (Tahana 2012). In a weak democratic state such as Tonga, how do ordinary citizens hold media, especially the New Zealand media, accountable for reporting which privileges the leadership of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands over and above all others, reducing the political scale to one man?

The Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands is one of four Tongan political parties. This party received less than thirty per cent of the total vote in the 2010 general election; the overwhelming majority of citizens registered on the general roll voted for independent candidates (Matangi Tonga 2010). To hone in narrowly on one ideology of the political spectrum, one power struggle, which effectively prohibits public awareness and discussion on alternative arrangements for parliamentary democracy, undermines egalitarianism, impartiality, fairness, and equal opportunity in an environment of free and independent politics. This being the case, and a plausible scenario, democratic reform in practice is a facade, a sham, a make-believe new order, a mockery of ideals.

When academics and journalists engaged in the information industry speak and write of Tongan politics and leadership, we name and describe men, not women. Women who do feature prominently in narratives of the nation are women from above: Queen Salote Tupou III (Wood-Ellem 2001), and of late, media sound-bites from Queen Salote's granddaughter, Princess Pilolevu (Morrah 2012). Writers and documenters go to great lengths to capture on paper, film and photograph men of status, age and rank, not youth, newness

and innovation. Reports are fixated on men by fixing them in time and rank as representing one static thing or the other, the upper class or the common mass; men who are not fluid, who are unfeeling and wholly inadaptable, incapable, uncomfortable, unconfident to operate outside of class boundaries, mental limitations and social restrictions (Said 1978).

To make sense of complexity and change in twenty first century Tonga, the standard descriptions about men and power which are inscribed, inflicted, and willed to truth, need rewriting not regurgitating (Foucault 1972). The male catalogue is outdated. The analysis is shallow. The portrayals persist in spinning repetitious stories of what we in the west, the developed countries of the Pacific Rim, believe about them, the small island developing states; the aid recipients of small societies, caught up in small hierarchies, with small lives and small minds that we would have to modify, control, adjust to be more like us and ours, if we are to help them (Chatterjee 1994). In real life, aging paternalism is suffocating the ungrateful recipients of condescension, most notably, when it is gift wrapped as development assistance with puppet strings attached.

Derek Brien, executive director of the Pacific Institute of Public Policy, an independent think-tank for regional policy based in Vanuatu, discussed the ambivalence of China's political ascendance over New Zealand and Australia. China is looked upon by Pacific Islanders as having the strongest influence over aid, trade, migration, security and international relations in the South Pacific. Hesitant attitudes hinge on Chinese migration where people oscillate between two minds; on the one hand approving of China aid, political ties and trade, but on the other hand, censorious towards the outward migration flows from Asia to the Pacific Islands (Coorey 2012).

> Which is the most valued international partner to your country? China often out-polled say Australia or New Zealand. At the same time, in the press there is a lot of

> backlash against the rise of China's immigration. So there's a disconnect between a perception that China aid, China diplomacy is good and better than say Australia and New Zealand because the Chinese aid and development comes without strings attached to it. And yet there is a backlash going on about the rise in migration. It's something we need to understand more.

For crafting public knowledge, it is that distinct and exclusive minority group, those of us who investigate and publish for a living, which may require thought and behaviour modification. Developed countries and citizens preach to the small island developing states that transparency and accountability underpin and sustain democracy. To achieve this with any measure of competency, academics and journalists are better to examine us in relation to the subject, us in respect of them whom we speak of, by extending the interrogation scalpel into the "epistemic violence" we commit and for what beneficial purpose, what integrity and conscientiousness, if any, to community, cooperation and collective (Spivak 1990, p. 99).

I include myself in probing what researchers, writers, reporters, earning a living from publishing about politics and society in the South Pacific Islands do, and the motives propelling the doing. It is unconvincing to claim neutrality and disentanglement from the subject of study in a highly politicised and competitive industry rooted in manufacturing knowledge for public consumption. Careers are made from working an angle to stories, scoops, reports, articles, chapters, books. One's professional advancement and remuneration scale depends on a high level of production. These factors give cause for doing work.

My point is what does the work we do *actually* do for the people we speak of by writing politics and society? In speaking about the small island developing states of the South Pacific sub-region – poor countries with small populations, weak democracies, and meagre resources – are academics and journalists ethically compelled to produce work that is

beneficial to communities, economies, governments, and nations? By doing work that benefits them, do one's views and analyses shift towards theirs so that the work becomes ours not mine, singularly?

Is this the order of the "discourse" which Foucault (1972) explained in detail? What Foucault meant was that across academic disciplines there are rules, proscriptions, canons, tastes, processes, which one is under the authority of. In researching and writing from an intellectual and cultural location, a particular orientation in the knowledge industry, the researcher is subject to regulations, sanctions and conventions designed by the discipline to govern over, and validate the authority of, the field of expertise.

In the contemporary South Pacific, are researchers given license to research for the sake of research? Can we choose a topic of investigation simply because it interests us and we think it may appeal to funders, benefactors, governments and universities with little regard for doing research that improves lives, livelihoods and living environments? How do social and ethical obligations vary? By this, how do researchers who are insiders of the communities being researched *differ* in their research relationship from those who are outsiders, foreigners, non-affiliates, non-relatives to the ethnicity, culture, language, country, and people under analysis? (Ceglowski 2000).

Ma'afu's words

Interweaving Deborah Ceglowski's (1997, 2000) lived experience as an ethnographer with mine, the complexity shaping a researcher's relationship to the subject being researched – the people and place under examination – consequently shapes the researcher's position on the subject. In saying this, the scene change in my story about what is a noble's role in a democratised Tonga pays attention to Ma'afu's words interspersed among my own. Intermingling with a noble's sentiment is dangerous. The risk is that with Tongans

in the homeland and in diaspora, even among the so-called "polite society" Paul Raffaele mentioned (2007, p. 165), an ordinary woman is misconceived "as a doormat or a prostitute" to paraphrase Rebecca West's legendary quote (West 2012). I will risk that danger for I am no ordinary woman, but as Karlo Mila described, I am an ordinary woman with extraordinary situations and experiences that make up my life (Mila-Schaaf 2010).

Benyavanga Wainaina sketched his view of Tanzanians. He is Kenyan. The mental comparison was strikingly familiar. Wainana may as well have been a New Zealand-born Tongan commenting about the Tongans living in the islands (Wainana 2012).

> Tanzanians amaze me – they have a languid self-assurance I have seen nowhere else. It really goads us Kenyans – we like to feel that we are a progressive people who have left all this communal African nonsense and acquired a hard-nosed get-with-the-programme attitude.

I mention Wainaina because his interplay of contrasting Tanzanians against Kenyans, their individual histories and adaption methods for becoming modern African nations, resonate somewhat in my own sentiments of being a Tongan New Zealander of mixed-ethnicity; that is, an adult woman born in New Zealand with this country's citizenship and having Tongan, Maori, Samoan and European ancestry. I have thought that my lived experience had cultivated me to be more "progressive" and "hard-nosed" in the real world compared to my relatives and friends born, raised and living in Tonga. This "hard-nosed get-with-the-programme" Tiwi (meaning Tongan Kiwi) attitude has earned me respect and criticism, support and antagonism, allies and rivals.

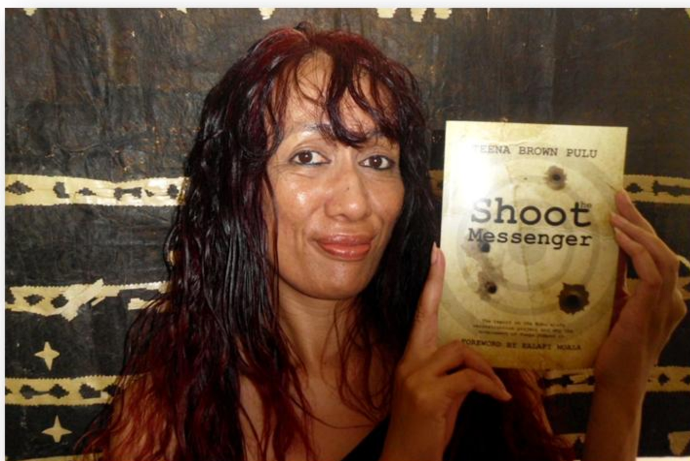
Reflecting on my book about Tonga's start-up glitches in doing democracy, it was bound to ignite controversy. A mixed bag of applause and condemnation did two things at once. It inspired others to stand up and speak up to power, while at

the same time, upsetting a hornet's nest of objectors and objectionable commentators (Matangi Tonga 2012a). To publicise my take on political tensions in the Kingdom of Tonga was unprecedented. It was more that my identity position on the outer edge of Tongan politics, culture and society was an uncommon place to speak from.

I am familiar with migrant Tongans who are academics employed in New Zealand universities policing and restricting my movements in what they consider is authentic Tongan scholarship regulated, of course, by their self-appointed jurisdiction. Such dogma is ingrained in the belief that my category – mixed-blood Tongans born overseas, Tongans who speak English as a first language, middle-class Tongans educated by liberal western universities – are not properly ethnic, cultural and socialised to qualify under the traditional criteria for real Natives.

What I did not foresee is that *some* (not all) Tongans would judge it is as un-Tongan, unnatural and impermissible for a woman to author a book hard-hitting in its criticism. Evidencing an argument with factual material and speaking out against the actions of government employees who were men brought in by the Prime Minister, my matrilineal uncle, had made me categorically un-Tongan. Accepting that Tongan women are not allowed to do this kind of research reinforces a menacing and self-depreciating system of social control and intellectual censorship, directly opposing principles associated with a democratic state and society – gender equality, academic freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom of the press.

Teena Brown Pulu, Shoot the Messenger



Foucault (1985) explained my subject position as the researcher who is a somewhat marginalised insider. In this context, insider means that I am an ethnic and cultural affiliate to the people and place being researched. Marginalised, by comparison, indicates that I am not centred in, nor am I central to, tradition. My identity position is situated as counter to, and deviant from, social institutions whose prerogative is to be in charge of convention and standardise norms.

> My intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of truth-teller or truth-telling as an activity. By this I mean that, for me, it was not a question of analyzing the internal or external criteria that would enable the Greeks or Romans, or anyone else, to recognize whether a statement or proposition is true or not. At issue for me was rather the attempt to consider truth-telling as a specific activity or as a role. (Foucault 1985, p. 219).

Naming my book, *Shoot the Messenger: The report on the Nuku'alofa reconstruction project and why it was dumped*, was a deliberate writing strategy on my part. The title alluded to the notion of metaphorical death as captured in literary works. Muhammad Munawwar explained this type of speech and action. "By metaphorical death, here, is meant the first kind of death. Dead, metaphorically, are persons who exist but are not counted among the living. They are rather counted out" (Munawwar 1986, p. 5). In my case, by writing what was considered a controversial text on Tonga's struggles with democratic reform had gotten me shot, in a figurative sense. The original report which was published in the book, I was dismissed for, by way of a letter from the Prime Minister's Office. I was not paid for the research that the Prime Minister had authorised me to do. I had departed from this world with no recognition that the sixty eight page report, existed. The report was dead and so was I by an official sacking order.

To return to Foucault's point (1972, p. 219), "my intention was not to deal with the problem of truth." The Tongan system for measuring and deciding truth, in contrast to fiction, is dominated and predicated by men, specifically high ranking men from an older generation. In Tonga, authority determines knowledge and one does not occupy a position of authority unless they have social status. Foucault's theory feeds the Tongan context in that power equals knowledge, and those who occupy a position of power in the system are the superior ones to determine knowledge over, and about, inferior others.

What my book did was highlight the role of the messenger who knowingly puts oneself on the line simply because the will to speak truthfully of one's "lived experience" is more important than the personal fear of vengeance being executed against them by the power structure (Spry 2001). What if, against the odds of levelling patriarchy and hierarchy, the messenger who gets shot is a woman of difference from a younger generation? Is the "truth-teller or truth-telling as an

activity" (Foucault 1972, p. 219) more problematic and of greater difficulty to contain, discipline, punish and render invisible because the identity difference sits outside the borders of tradition, what we – the dominant culture – know and are familiar with when silencing a subordinate Tongan woman?

In adopting a democratic system, does the power structure adapt to new ways of crushing dissent? Or, does the dissenter adapt to new ways of truth-telling because the activity itself expresses civil freedom in a democratic state and society? By no means am I saying that truth is established by using a one size fits all formula. Truth varies according to context, and what is provably real for one group may be unreliable for others. What I am saying, however, is that in Tonga, a small island developing state that has undergone rapid social and economic change, the belief that *only* the privileged few with authority can define and confine knowledge is stubbornly resistant to shift.

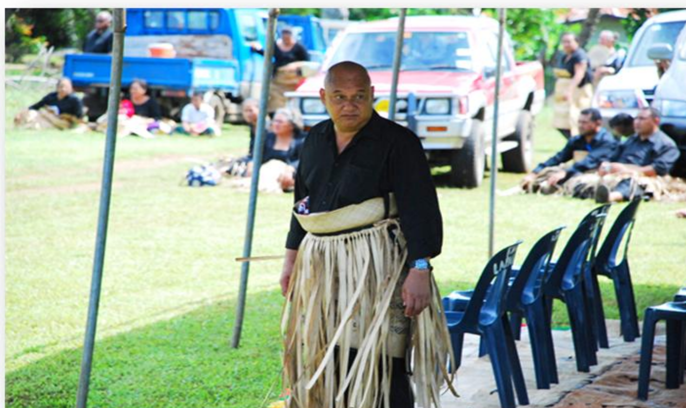
It is an odd twist of circumstance that my trustworthy supporter inside government who went into bat for my defence over the notorious report was a noble and a cabinet minister (Brown Pulu 2011, pp. 13-14). At a glance, we had little, if anything, in common through our employment fields and cultural politics. We did not mix in the same circles. I was far from conservative and traditionalist in Tonga, and he was far from liberal and left wing in New Zealand. In my book, I spoke of my introduction to Ma'afu in Tonga (Brown Pulu 2011, p. 19).

> I first met Lord Ma'afu at his government office in February 2011. A cabinet minister and a noble's representative for Tongatapu, he made an incisive comment. "In the future, land will become a security issue."

Ma'afu's words stripped my conscience bare. Caught in that moment, I was the one suffering from a socially elite condition. Listening to him speak, I felt privileged developed

country guilt: "In the future, land will become a security issue." In Tonga, as with other Pacific Island states, land is a contested and diminishing resource. Sibling disputes between brothers and sisters over land entitlement are commonplace (Brown Pulu 2011, p. 19). Unused bush allotments and unoccupied homes are widespread in villages, districts and outer islands due to mass migration to town, the urban sprawl of Nuku'alofa on the main island of Tongatapu, or overseas to New Zealand, Australia and the United States of America.

Lord Ma'afu, Minister for Lands and Environment



Squatter settlements in Pa Tangata and Sopu on Nuku'alofa's outskirts are spreading in size and growing in population; a signpost that state urban planning is not managing resettlement for outer island migrants without land tenure on Tongatapu. Perhaps most daunting and with the least amount of resource injection and state policy prioritisation, "the hungry tide" is eating away at the low lying coastal areas, while frequent storms and cyclones cause flooding and damage to roads, housing and infrastructure (Zubrycki 2011; Brown Pulu 2011, p. 20). Climate change is

real and so too is climate change homelessness and consequential forced migration (Barnett 2001; Lovelock 2009; Giddens 2009). Linked to the prospect of land scarcity and landlessness is food security which is evident in Tonga’s day-to-day dependence on imported food, rather than the consumption of locally grown produce and fish.

Ma’afu noted that climate change had altered “everything” about everyday life for Tongans. Tonga’s aspirations were pinned on reaching a legally binding agreement at the United Nations, one that held all member states answerable for reducing carbon emissions and financial assistance to developing countries for climate change adaption. Asked his opinion on the likelihood of an international agreement happening he responded with a playful grin: “I would like to hope” (World Focus Online 2010).

> In fact we’re getting to a stage where we don’t have a cyclone season. It just turns up out of the blue. It’s affected our water supply, the food crops. I think I could probably sum it up and say, everything’s not the same anymore because of climate change. I would like to hope. I think that’s the best thing we can do is hope for it. I don’t think I could hope for anything else.

My position on Tonga’s land sustainability, where land is the baseline economic resource across all class groups underpinning the local food supply and national export trade, is tied to Anthony Giddens’ argument on “the politics of climate change” (Giddens 2008, p. 5).

> Where books and articles have been written about the “politics of climate change,” they tend to be about such international agreements. I want to make the somewhat startling assertion that, at present, we have no effective politics of climate change, especially at a national level where much of the action must happen. This is to say, there is no developed analysis of the political changes we have to make if the aspirations we have to limit climate change are to become real.

For sustainable livelihood in Tonga, the politics of land and climate change go hand in hand where policy and planning is devised in reference to three interrelated principles; land and resource management, environmental sustainability and the mitigation of, and adaption to, the effects of climate change. Giddens' analysis is relevant to Tonga. "At a national level where much of the action must happen," it does not (Giddens 2008, p. 5). Action on climate change is deferred to a regime of "international agreements." Situated in the global government, the Pacific Islands form a sub-minority cluster of the developing countries recognised for the serious impact that climate change has had on small landmass and populations, which are considering relocation as a mitigation option.

At the level of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Polynesian sub-region of the South Pacific Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu and Tokelau, is observed for compliance with the political stakes of their developed country neighbours, Australia and New Zealand. Ma'afu illuminated the politics of deferral when operating on a regional and international stage as a small player in respect of the big players who double up as development partners, meaning aid donors. His discussion was recorded at the regional climate change workshop for Pacific parliaments. The workshop was held in Australia and organised by the inter-parliamentary union, including the Australian and New Zealand parliaments and the United Nations development programme (Kennett 2011, pp. 44-45).

> And Tonga's Lord Ma'afu says while there is still no universal agreement on climate change action, the voices of the Pacific Island nations are being carried by their larger neighbours. "I think they've been heard, but the end result ... is a bit slow," he says. "We've said so much, and I think Australia and New Zealand and the countries close to us have realised the problems we're facing and they are there for us."

Anthony Giddens mapped out the unequal power relations governing the politics of climate change on the global front (2009). He was critical of a "complete consensus style method" being the sole process for international agreement. Under this convention, developed countries of the West along with the large developing countries of Asia – India, China and Japan – have to reach a consensus on a legally binding agreement to reduce carbon emissions because collectively, they represent the world's largest polluters. If an accord is not formed during the United Nations summit that runs every two years for a week, then no legally binding agreement exists. The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen 2009 was, by Giddens' sentiment, "a fiasco" that had no practicable outcomes relevant to tackling climate change through a global regime. What Copenhagen did manage to do was unfold the state of international relations in that the world clearly does not possess a system of "global governance" or the universal logic to create one suited to coming up with solutions, instead of cultivating standoffs between countries that permit inactivity (Giddens 2010).

> Copenhagen to me explains the more general system of international relations we have at the moment where we live in a more interdependent world, climate change being a negative expression of that, but we simply don't have the instruments of global governance to effectively control the forces that we've unleashed. And we've got to build them. But the way to build them, however, is not, I think, through United Nations complete consensus style method. Kyoto has not had much impact on global emissions, we all know that. It took an awful long time to be ratified. We don't have that time. I always thought we needed a more experimental and fast moving process, which for me, could have gone on alongside Kyoto style agreements. We are going to have to pioneer new structures in international relations and climate change has to be an expression of this and a means of doing so.

Outwardly, Tonga is conflated in the Polynesian sub-region and looked upon as accepting of Australia and New Zealand's dominance over regional policy on security, migration and trade. This is not a simple Western Alliance. The Tonga Energy Road Map, a national strategy aimed at implementing fifty per cent renewable energy sources by 2020, has questioned the impression that Tonga has a *natural* predisposition towards the West (Tonga Energy Road Map 2010). Development partners and technology are sought from the Middle East and Asia. Since 2004, three consecutive governments have maintained the "Look to the East" policy in foreign affairs and trade. This is a tell-tale sign of changing geopolitical relations in the South Pacific region (Taumoepeau-Tupou 2004, p. 4). Most recently, the memorandum of understanding between Masdar, a United Arab Emirates renewable energy company, and the Government of Tonga to build a 500 kilowatt solar photovoltaic power plant in Vava'u, the northern outer island group, signifies Giddens' judgment that "a more experimental and fast moving process" is the preferred development strategy (Giddens 2010; Masdar 2012).

Energy is integrated into Ma'afu's ministerial portfolio. At the 2012 Pacific Leaders Meeting for the International Renewable Energy Agency in Abu Dhabi he voiced what Anthony Giddens had advised. In Tonga's political interests his country needed "a more experimental and fast moving process" through one-on-one negotiations with the global agency, as well as direct relationships with various companies and donors willing to assist the Tonga Energy Road Map. The present arrangement between countries under global governance was ineffective in gaining collective agreement and putting policy into action. Tonga was "going to have to pioneer new structures in international relations" (Giddens 2010). This small island developing state was constrained by time and transforming Tonga's energy sector into renewable sources was a foundation measure towards lessening the

effects of climate change (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2012).

> Lord Ma'afu, Minister of Lands, Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources, Tonga, indicated his support for IRENA's proposed work programme. He also stressed that the time to act is limited, and that IRENA should develop bilateral relations with each Pacific nation.

Fiji economist Wadan Narsey was sceptical that countries in the Polynesian sub-region would ever muster enough motivation to stage independence from New Zealand's overpowering hold on foreign affairs and trade. In this co-dependency mix was Tonga, which Narsey positioned alongside Samoa in being firmly locked down in "New Zealand's camp," despite efforts from the Melanesian Spearhead Group of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to orchestrate a Pacific Islands alliance for security, trade and migration. The Polynesian sub-region was ambivalent towards, and doubtful of, the Melanesian Spearhead Group's innovation in changing regional relations by challenging New Zealand and Australia's leadership of the Pacific Islands Forum. A visible marker of their reservation was the 2011 formation of the Polynesian Leaders Group headed by Samoa's Prime Minister; an amalgamation of the eight small island developing states, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and French Polynesia. This was a political response to the Melanesian Spearhead Group that contested, rather than aligned with, Melanesia's collective power and regional representation (Ilalio 2011).

> No power-hungry Pacific politician is ever going to prise the Cook Islands, Tokelau or Niue (or even Samoa and Tonga) out of New Zealand's camp. ...The strengthening of the Melanesian Spearhead Group has been assisted by Fiji's belligerent attitude towards Australia and New Zealand, secretly admired by the political leaders of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, who have long harboured intense resentment at what they

> perceive to be paternalistic and condescending attitudes of Australian and New Zealand political leaders towards the Melanesians. (Narsey 2012).

The Polynesian and Melanesian rupture over regional leadership and spheres of influence are fuelled by Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa's condemnation of Fiji's regime led by Commodore Frank Bainimarama since the military takeover of December 5th, 2006. Geopolitically, Bainimarama alleged that Tuilaepa's puppet strings were attached to, and pulled by, New Zealand and Australia. In the tit-for-tat fashion of "trading insults," Tuilaepa accused Bainimarama of "lying" about holding a general election in 2014, insinuating that democracy would not be reinstated in Fiji under the Commodore's untrustworthy leadership (Davis 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

Generally, it is seen that there is no love lost between the political leaders of Samoa and Fiji. Their fixed positions and fractured relations appear to be non-negotiable and irreconcilable. What is over-looked and under-analysed is Tonga's in-between location and dislocation in the Melanesia and Polynesia rift. The Kingdom of Tonga is connected to, as well as independent from, Samoa and Fiji. It is convenient myth making to assume that Tonga would robotically get into bed with Samoa over Fiji. Samoa is not automatically the preferred partner. Ma'afu's discussion at the 2011 engaging with the Pacific leaders meeting hosted by the Government of Fiji, with twelve Pacific states in attendance, revealed that Tonga and Fiji relations were amiable, necessary and geared towards strengthening bilateral trade (Nadi Communiqué 2011).

> Tonga's representative to the second Engaging with the Pacific Meeting, Lord Ma'afu, said Tonga needs Fiji like any other Pacific country because of its resources and advancement in different sectors. "Fiji and Tonga's relationship goes beyond the political needs of the two countries." Lord Ma'afu said Tonga wants to increase trade with Fiji. "An increase in trade between the two

> countries will bring the two nations together. (Swami 2011).

As well as affirming trade cooperation between Tonga and Fiji, Ma'afu consoled unease about recent tensions between the neighbouring states over Tonga's protection given to former Fijian military officer, Tevita Mara, and the border clash regarding Minerva reef (Lina 2011). Tonga's 2011 diplomatic assistance in relocating Mara outside of Fiji where he was to stand trial for treason against the military regime had caused considerable friction (Mara 2011). In the same year, Minerva reef ignited into a territorial dispute because of Tonga's bid to the International Seabed Authority to sponsor Nautilus Minerals Incorporated to conduct seabed mining exploration outside of the Kingdom's exclusive economic zone in the Lau Basin, the international waters between Tonga and Fiji (Nautilus Minerals 2012). Ma'afu's peace offering was Tonga's pledge to support "Fiji's road map to democracy" as well as their re-admission to the Pacific Islands Forum after a 2009 suspension for not bringing about immediate democratic elections, as had been demanded by New Zealand and Australia (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2009).

> Lord Ma'afu says Tonga is still a strong ally and close relative of Fiji. Lord Ma'afu says that Tonga will continue to support Fiji and wants to see Fiji included in the Pacific Islands Forum. He says the Mara issue was a family matter and had nothing to do with Fiji – Tonga relations. Lord Ma'afu also adds that the Minerva reef dispute will be solved between the two countries and there is no need for a third party. Tonga says it is happy with Fiji's roadmap to democracy. (Fiji Forum 2011).

Feleti Sevele, Tonga's former prime minister from 2006 to 2010 spoke candidly about Fiji's leadership role in the region. The stand he took in 2009 at his address to the Pacific cooperation foundation in Wellington, New Zealand, resonates in Ma'afu's words and persists as the Government of Tonga

stance. Fiji is not the region's adversary, and a functional democracy is country-specific, not built from a kit set model that identically replicates New Zealand, Australia, the USA and nation-states of the developed West (Sevele 2009, pp. 8-9).

> Fijian leadership in the past has benefitted the region as a whole. We believe that Fiji has a future commensurate with its history, and we will neither help Fiji nor help ourselves by expelling Fiji as a nation altogether. Fiji needs the [Pacific Islands] Forum, and the Forum needs Fiji. It might well be the more prudent approach for us, Members of the Forum, to stand back, reconsider our approach to Fiji, and allow Fiji time to work out their way forward.
> For many years the Tongan Government has said to its critics, 'Do not impose a form of government on us that suits cultures elsewhere but is not Tongan. Let us, even help us, evolve our own workable, culturally-imbued form of democracy, but please do not lecture us on what we should do.' We cannot ask for this for ourselves without acknowledging the force of the same plea in the case of Fiji.

With my kainga

"Tomorrow I have to be with my kainga. It is my last day of duty." My ears picked up on the fatigue in his voice. Ma'afu was resolute that he had familial obligation to carry out. He was referring to the *ha'amo*, the traditional presentations made to the royal family by the nobles and their villages and clans after the late King's burial and the new King's *taumafa kava*, the kava ceremony symbolising his acceptance of the monarch's role and responsibility (Radio and TV Tonga News 2012).

Lord Ma'afu, Noble of Vaini and Tokomololo

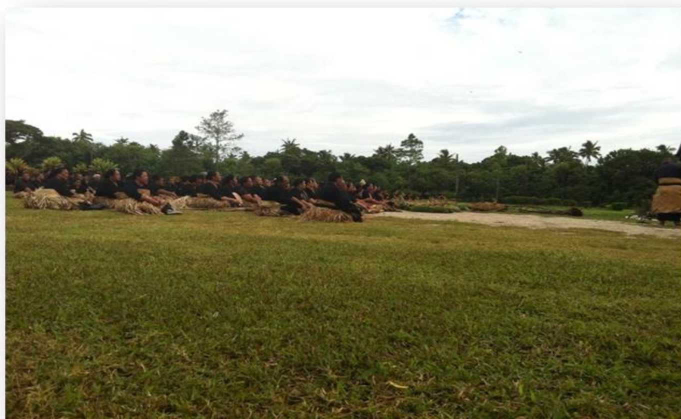
Mercilessly, I had attacked him in Tonga during the weekend of the *pongipongi tapu*, the ceremony issuing in King Tupou VI on Saturday March 31st, 2012. My mother's family had murmured that Ma'afu was the only noble insistent on making presentations to the royal family for the one hundred day mourning period, which had been cut short by the monarch. He had committed his *ha'a* to the cost and burden of an outdated drawn out ceremony. "Ma'afu and his ha'a are continuing for the hundred days. The other nobles aren't. It's only him. Ma'afu did it." My cousin's tone was scornful. "Everyone is happy the King's funeral is short. It's over. Why does Ma'afu have to do that? He's killing his people."

Incensed by what I had been told, I let Ma'afu know: Why would he go against the monarch's wishes and the nobility who had agreed that the expense of a state funeral for one hundred days should not be carried by the people? He waited until I had returned to Auckland, New Zealand, before explaining his position. It was not the case. There were

others who went against the noble majority, a stand which he did not support. A minority wanted the deceased monarch to lie in state at the royal palace for two-nights and a one hundred day mourning period adhered to, despite the new King's request that in Tonga's economic interests such tradition had to be modified (Ministry of Information and Communications 2012b, 2012c).

Ma'afu's town officers for Vaini and Tokomololo had collected $50.00 Tongan pa'anga per household in the two villages on his estate. He had scolded, not wanting to enforce an obligatory donation of a set cash amount, especially in trying financial times. This was standard procedure for town officers throughout the Kingdom of Tonga's villages and districts to collect money for a state funeral. Ma'afu, however, was prepared to brunt the larger costs on his own, and instructed the town officers to record all spending and report this to the people. Unspent money collected from Vaini and Tokomololo, he was adamant would go back to the village accounts for the people's use and benefit.

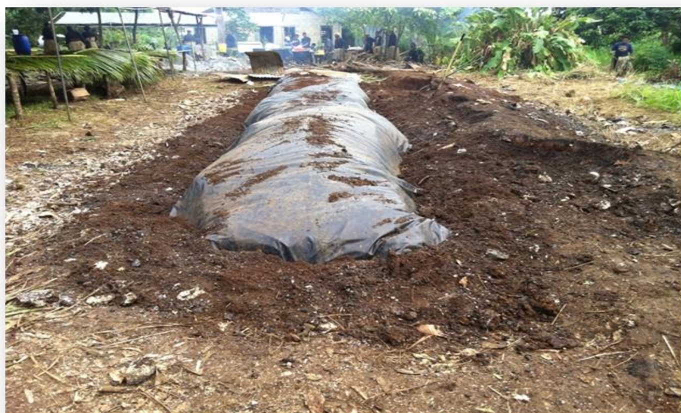
Vaini and Tokomololo, Ha'amo – Presentation to the Royal Family



In 2002 when Kalafi Moala wrote that the "nobles are useless" in *Island Kingdom Strikes Back*, I cheered him on (Moala 2002, p. 296). In 2012, my views have altered. This is partly because in ten years I have gained experience and maturity as a researcher and writer. But mostly, it is because I know Ma'afu, and have witnessed the invaluable work he contributes to the public service as a minister, and to community service as a noble. In a small island system of patriarchy where male dominance is habitual and female activism is stifled, I feel blessed among women to exchange mutual respect and appreciation with a man whom I would have otherwise written off as "useless" if I did not have an opening to engage his intellect, conversation and ideas.

This is not to say that the nobility is a homogeneous class group operating in the same way (Brown Pulu 2011, pp. 22-23). The mode and manner in which nobles interact with their villages and clans can differ across estates. Some associations are broken, resulting in villagers showing little regard or respect for the noble. Relationships, in the village context, are determined by the character and calibre of leadership. What becomes perceptible is that a cordial interface is sustained by men of the landed gentry who are responsive to social and economic change. The organisational culture of an estate is functional when the noble works willingly and collaboratively with his people's collective ambition. Village aspiration is a reflection of the contemporary world, a concerted move towards equity, fairer resource distribution, and access to income-making opportunity – a values base associated with democratic organisation.

Umu – Earth oven at Vaini, Food Preparation for Presentation to the Royal Family



What is a noble's role in a democratised Tonga? Put simply, a noble's role is to democratise Tonga. As contradictory as this seems, it is the impetus of social change; that the nobility and the monarchy are a measure of stability and consistency in contributing to and monitoring Tonga's political reform. Concurrently, it is the internal checks and balances of the landed gentry which should, in theory, pull up and correct those nobles who are *not* being receptive to, and conscientious about, improving relationships and the quality of life on their estates.

Oddly enough I began this paper with Winston Churchill, an excerpt from Hansard, the British parliamentary debates recorded on November 11th, 1947. As a conservative politician, this is what Churchill is remembered for; charismatic, but highly politicised speechmaking (Churchill 1985). It is here that I will sum up my tale of democracy dilemmas in the Kingdom of Tonga.

To restate Churchill's words, "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that

democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." This moral value of democracy being an imperfect system of state and society, which despite its flaws, outflanks other models of national organisation is evocative and seductive. Situated in the political context of 1947 post-World War II Europe, the continent was split into western and eastern spheres of influence. An eastern bloc materialised under the communist regime led by the former Soviet Union, the USSR (Dragomir 2012; Van de Grift 2012). The sharp division represented the battle of opposing political ideologies that swept the world in the mid twentieth century; western democracy and capitalism versus communism, a central government and one-party system of socialism.

Lord Ma'afu, Noble of Vaini and Tokomololo

The reason why it is seductive to envisage democracy as the superior route to development is that there are only two prominent models emerging from twentieth century western history to select from. In a two-way race, the system of power devised by the more powerful and wealthy contestant is the popular choice. Democracy is youthful, only more than a century old (Goldsmith 1993). But it is customary in the

sense that around the world peoples have been persuaded to create nation-states in its name and accept that democracy and capitalism are the universal way forward. In the case of Tonga, the models for political reform, economic development and social progress have been decided for Tongans by western parliamentary democracy as the prototype. There is nothing else to imagine, no alternatives, but to believe that one's country is a small island developing state maturing into the western ideal of a developed capitalist state (Chatterjee 1994).

But is that really believable? When do developing states graduate into the developed class? And what of smallness; how do small island states sustain natural environments and grow market economies when global forces of consumption, not production, dictate that the South Pacific Islands consume more than what they produce at an unsustainable, untenable, unaffordable and unliveable rate?

If there is one tender point I have with my own ancestral homeland, the Kingdom of Tonga, and its combined effort at doing democracy in the second decade of the twenty first century, then it is straightforward. The reach and thoughtfulness of debate and dialogical exchange between class, gender and age groups has not happened. Consequently, "collective sense-making" among, and between, Tongans of homeland and overseas communities has been short-cut and short-fused (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). This small island developing state of the South Pacific is reduced to being viewed through the distinct lens of one political party. In turn, the images and descriptions do not depict reform. Mistakenly, there is an insinuation that the people, ordinary Tongans not of royalty or the landed gentry, are politically homogeneous, reflecting a one-party state, a single-minded approach to who *really* should lead government and what democracy means in true practice.

Tongans have been shortlisted to a few male voices which win over public media, particularly the New Zealand media industry, by affirming that they have *more* right to represent

the people, and are *more* suited to running a democratic government, than the nobility (Mangnall 2012). This is simply not true, nor is it practicable, given Tonga's small population and skilled leadership base, if political reform is to be sustainable, peaceful and earnest about building an inclusive society, a responsive government, and a responsible parliament that deliberates wide ranging and transnational public interests.

The state funeral of King George Tupou V was a site that unravelled the politics and poetics of Tonga in change (Clifford and Marcus 1986). The death of the monarch was, in many respects, an emotional trigger that set-off politicking over who had the power and knowledge to modify culture and tradition in a hatchling democracy. It was unprecedented for migrant Tongans resettled overseas to argue that the first elected premier, the government and parliament had the authority over the new monarch, the royal family and nobility to call the shots for a state funeral, a national event, and lay down the length of time for the country's mourning period. What motivated some Tongans in New Zealand, Australia and the USA to believe that the democratisation of their island state could be used as a political mechanism to control tradition? The perplexing rationale is that by having more people's representatives in parliament and an elected prime minister, the common people can ensure that culture remains frozen, stagnant and fixed in time.

Why did the leadership of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands see that the monarch's death presented an opportune time to petition the new King to support their private members bill motioning that the nobles' representatives are elected into parliament by citizens registered on the general roll? Importantly, why do the views of Tongan citizens, the ordinary people living in the Kingdom of Tonga, continue to be sidelined, hushed and invisible in media messages focused on the "apex" of political reform; that is, how the people's parliamentary representatives view the

monarch, the prime minister and the government in respect of their own chances of bidding for power and assuming the country's leadership?

Leading up to Tonga's 2010 general election, political sensationalism had swept over this developing country. Citizens had *imagined* that democracy would bring power and prosperity to the people. Over a year into its course, the updated system had not transformed state and society or the economy. This was not surprising. Political systems perpetuate the status quo to consolidate the sustainability and durability of structure and process. Social expectation was unrealistically oriented in miracle making and momentary events such as the election of seventeen people's representatives as the mark of change, rather than what would entail once the changeover entered the House and settled in to work.

Tonga's democratic reform as the subject of study for researchers and journalists who speak from the position of outsiders, foreigners, non-affiliates to the people and place under examination, is subjected and subjugated to a process of control, which Barbara Bender names "the Western Gaze" (Bender 1999, p. 31). Under the microscope, politics and society in contemporary Tonga becomes represented in certain ways reflective of the outsider's method of understanding the subject in reference to their own system of power and knowledge. In the end, what is depicted in publications and reports, the images of this other place written up for a specific audience which is not necessarily the people being analysed, says more about "the Western Gaze" than it does about the lived experiences of the people it speaks of.

> The "Western Gaze" succinctly expresses a particular, historically constituted, way of perceiving and experiencing the world. It is a gaze that skims the surface; surveys the land from an ego-centric viewpoint; and invokes an active viewer (the subject) and a passive land (object). This active viewer is equated with 'culture' and the land with 'nature;' and the

> viewer/culture are gendered male, land/nature are gendered female. Finally, the Western Gaze is about control.

The irking question that started me unfolding this critical narrative, and which I conclude with now, is woven into Sut Jhally's probing of "why we have a preconceived notion of what kind of people live there, what they believe, how they act" (Jhally 2005, p. 3).

> ...the question of why we have a preconceived notion of what kind of people live there, what they believe, how they act, even though we may have never been there or indeed met anyone from there. The way that we acquire this knowledge is not innocent or objective, but the end of a process that reflects certain interests. That is, it is highly motivated.

The means by which prevalent ideas about contemporary Tonga are traced to a selection of people, sorted and pieced together, and disseminated in public media, is by no means accidental. It is, as Jhally says, "highly motivated" by an expedient political agenda. The difficult task is to to subvert "the Western Gaze" by mapping out an alternative system of knowledge closer to representing lived reality (Bender 1999). Here, what information gathering methods are inclusive of how people *really do* understand their own lives and living environments, free from outside ventriloquism? Related to this, what purpose does knowledge achieve when the researcher or the journalist persistently speaks over, about, and for, the voiceless subject?

On that note, I close with the voice of an insider, Tonga's longstanding independent media publisher, Kalafi Moala. Since 1989, Moala's newspaper, Taimi 'O Tonga, has published twice a week. This was no easy feat when in 1993 the paper relocated for a time to Auckland, New Zealand, to escape the censorship and control tactics of a state bureaucracy resistant to allowing civil freedoms guaranteed in Tonga's 1875 Constitution, such as freedom of speech, to

develop in relevance to society in change (Moala 2002). Moala collapses the binary opposition of goodies and baddies – the heroic democratic politicians versus the villainous nobility in government. There are no goodies and baddies in a complex story of how democracy takes effect in a small island developing state struggling to stay afloat in a global downturn. There are, however, politicians – all men, apart from one older generation woman appointed a cabinet minister – and on both sides of the House they speak and behave like politicians. What is so binary and oppositional about that?

> What is more concerning is the apparent lack of vision or plans being communicated to the people of Tonga. Few people, including those in government ranks, know where they are going. That is a sad indictment. And the opposition cannot claim any kudos. They’re worse than the government when it comes to communicating any views on the way the country should be heading. (Moala 2012).

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List of Photographs

Lord Ma'afu, Vaini, Kingdom of Tonga, October 2011
Photograph of Teena Brown Pulu, Auckland, New Zealand
Baron Fielakepa, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, September 2006
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Lord Tu'ivakano, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, March 2012
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Lord Ma'afu, Lapaha, Kingdom of Tonga, April 2010
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Kava, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, March 2012
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Lauaki, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, March 2012
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Royal Palace, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, May 2011
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
King Tupou VI, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, March 2012
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Fale Alea, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, November 2010
Photograph of Teena Brown Pulu, Auckland, New Zealand
King Tupou VI, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, March 2012
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Prime Minister's Office, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, November 2010
Photograph of Teena Brown Pulu, Auckland, New Zealand
Teena Brown Pulu, Auckland, New Zealand, February 2012
Photograph of Teena Brown Pulu, Auckland, New Zealand
Lord Ma'afu, Lapaha, Kingdom of Tonga, April 2010
Photograph of Melino Maka, Auckland, New Zealand
Lord Ma'afu, Tokomololo, Kingdom of Tonga, April 2012
Photograph of Tevita 'Unga Ma'afu, Vaini, Tonga
Vaini and Tokomololo, Kingdom of Tonga, April 2012
Photograph of Tevita 'Unga Ma'afu, Vaini, Tonga
Earth Oven, Vaini, Kingdom of Tonga, April 2012
Photograph of Tevita 'Unga Ma'afu, Vaini, Tonga
Lord Ma'afu, Vaini, Kingdom of Tonga, October 2011
Photograph of Teena Brown Pulu, Auckland, New Zealand

About the Author

Teena Brown Pulu is an anthropologist, ethnographer and author. Her first book was published in 2011 by Taimi Publishers, Kingdom of Tonga: *Shoot the Messenger: The report on the Nuku'alofa reconstruction project and why the Government of Tonga dumped it.*

Her PhD in anthropology, Kakai Tonga 'i 'Okalani Nu'u Sila: Tongan Generations in Auckland New Zealand was awarded by the University of Waikato in 2007. She is a lecturer at AUT University convening Master of Arts papers in Pacific development and Pacific literature.

Teena is the only child of Patricia Brown and Semi Pulu. She lives in Otahuhu, Auckland with her children and travels frequently to Tonga staying at the home of her maternal grandparents, Stanley Brown and 'Ana Kaho, in Havelu'loto.

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1 Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana-Champaign, USA: University of Illinois Press,Pp. 271-313. I realise that Spivak's notion of the "subaltern" is an awkward fit in my explanation of how Ma'afu has been made less or inferior by writers/speakers disparaging what is considered to be "sexual immorality" or behaviour deviancy. Spivak's discussion focused on how the practice of "sati" or "widow sacrifice" in India had been recorded in written history, particularly during the British colonial period. At a glance, there seems to be little grounds for comparison with Ma'afu's treatment as firstly, he occupies male social status in the Tongan hierarchy of landed gentry, and secondly, the context is contemporary Tongan politics and society. However, in alluding to Spivak's work there was a critical point I wanted to draw attention to. Why is it that commoners, ordinary Tongans, are quick to single out and condemn the intimate behaviour of certain members of the upper class, while reneging to enforce the same strict code to their own social group?