Finding a Fale:

A collaborative research project with the Tonga Leitis' Association (TLA) exploring the causes of and solutions to housing insecurity for leiti.

A thesis submitted to Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Development Studies.

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Abstract

This is a collaborative research project where I worked alongside the Tonga Leitis'[1] Association to conduct semi-structure interviews with 20 leiti into the causes of, and solutions to housing insecurity. I set out to follow a PAR (participatory action research) methodology but was constrained in fully implementing this due to constraints of the project timeline. This project draws on the principles of PAR as well as other indigenous research theories.

This project contributes to the academy's understanding of the life and challenges experienced by leiti. It shows that housing insecurity cannot be viewed in isolation but is influenced by many aspects of people's lives. This is especially true for 'vulnerable' minorities such as leiti. This project revealed that leiti experience marginalisation in many ways and showed that they are often survivors of significant levels of violence.

This study includes a range of recommendations which are driven from the participant interviews. These actions should create change which would ensure that Tongan society is more inclusive of leiti and would provide leiti with a safe space to reside if they experience violence or oppression.

Key Words

Development, PAR, participatory, action research, leiti, fakatangata, Tonga, housing, refuge, wellbeing, oppression, religion, discrimination, SOGI, rainbow, LGBTIAQ+, queer.

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[1] Leiti is an indigenous sexual/gender identity unique to Tonga.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of Poli Kefu (1980-2021) whose life was cut short in an act of violence as this thesis was being finalised. Poli was incredibly generous, humorous, loving, and dedicated to the progress of his country. He was a humanitarian, activist, community leader, and friend. Without Poli this research would not have been possible. It was an absolute pleasure to spend five weeks with you in Tonga working on this project. This world has lost an extraordinary soul. #justiceforpoli

Image 1- Author pictured (centre) with Poli (right) and Manase (left) at a research planning meeting in Nuku'alofa, Tonga (October 2019)

Acknowledgements

Preface

I've said it before: LGBT's name and meanings do not belong to us in the Pacific. It is not how we identify ourselves. It is not relevant to our place in society.

How hard is it to understand that in each of these countries there is an official language and an official term for each of us? That's 22 ways to say who we are. If you want our vote on an international forum, learn 22 words.

Here's a quick mnemonic I've made up to help you remember, in the spirit, of course, of the Outgames; and that is:

MVPFAFF

M for Mahu in Tahiti and Hawai'i.

V for Vaka sa lewa lewa in Fiji.

P for Palopa in Papua New Guinea.

F for Fa'afafine in Samoa and American Samoa.

A for Akava'ine in the Cook Islands.

The second **F** for Fakaleiti or leiti in the Kingdom of Tonga.

The third **F** for Fakafefine in Niue.

Imagine the pride in our faces as they speak to us in a term that we understand.

- Phylesha Brown-Acton, Keynote Speech, 2nd Asia Pacific Out Games (2011)

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Chapter One - Introduction

"I believe that telling our stories, first to ourselves and then to one another and the world, is a revolutionary act. It is an act that can be met with hostility, exclusion, and violence. It can also lead to love, understanding, transcendence, and community." — Janet Mock (2014)

How it began

In the beginning, was a relationship. This was a friendship forged in the unique pressure cooker called the Ship for World Youth (SWY) Programme. Here two young people from different countries and backgrounds met on board a ship called the Nippon Maru. They were among 240 young people from 11 countries sharing their culture and skills and building mutual understanding. They kept in touch and ten years later agreed to undertake some research together.

As a naïve 19-year-old, SWY involved many 'firsts' in my life. It was my first time leaving my home-country of Aotearoa, it was my first-time living aboard a ship, and it was my first-time inhabiting space where I was a cultural and ethnic minority. I learned a great deal, about the people, history, and challenges of places that I had never encountered before. It was also the first time I had been asked to articulate my own culture as a Pākehā New Zealander.

Perhaps most importantly it was on the Ship for World Youth Programme when I first publicly 'came out of the closet'. Not only did I come out, but I fell in love with a handsome Peruvian. We became the token gay couple of the programme. This was a hugely transformative experience as I felt like I was finally free to be myself for the first-time in my life.

It may seem self-indulgent to begin a thesis with these personal reflections, yet these experiences form the very foundation of this project. It was also on SWY that I met Poli Kefu, a community worker and activist from Tonga. Ten years later I messaged him and raised the idea of collaborating on some research. I am so grateful that he agreed.

SYW also laid the foundation of my work in community development over the last decade. It gave me a global perspective which challenged my understanding of borders and division. It made me more aware of injustice and fired my passion to fight for equity and fairness. In many ways my experience on SWY influenced my decision to study international development.

The more I worked in community development and the more I studied theories relating to international development, the more sensitive I became to identifying structures of oppression and exploitation in these fields. I saw outside 'experts' coming into communities to use their 'knowledge and skills' to 'fix'

the 'problems' that *they* identified. These interventions sometimes caused more harm than good, and after a short amount of time the 'expert' would leave feeling like they had 'made a difference.'

One of my first professional roles was to coordinate the rainbow[2] support office at the University of Otago. Initially I enjoyed being approached by academics who wanted to conduct research on the experiences of rainbow students. But over time I developed research-fatigue as the number of requests began to feel detrimental to the wellbeing of rainbow students on campus. While the researchers wanted to learn more about the challenges that faced LGBTIAQ+ and questioning students, it led to some of us feeling pathologised and disempowered in the process.

This critique of traditional research paradigms, and outsider-led development, was deepened when I worked for World Vision New Zealand. During that time, I had the privilege of visiting an ADP (Area Development Project) in rural India, where I was treated like royalty. I was the outsider 'donor' there to observe how 'our' donations were being spent. At each village I visited I was greeted with song and dance and tremendous hospitality. I was assured that this was local custom but could not help feeling the tension and power imbalance in those relationships.

It was therefore deeply refreshing to encounter Participatory Action Research (PAR) while studying international development. PAR is an approach which aims to conduct non-exploitative and non-extractive research, compared with traditional social science research approaches. It is predicated on a genuine relationship between the 'outsider' researcher(s) and the 'insider' co-researcher(s). It seeks to empower and equip the co-researcher(s) as well as be driven by *their* research requirements rather than the 'outsider's'. It also attempts to create real and meaningful change through this process, both for the individuals directly involved, and for the community more broadly. PAR at its simplest involves researchers and participants working together to examine a problematic situation and to change it for the better (Kindon, Pain, Kesby. 2007).

While I was unable to perfectly apply PAR methodology to this research project (see chapters four and five) it has guided the research from the outset. When I first approached Poli to talk about conducting some shared research I had initial hopes that this would focus on law reform as sex between men is still illegal in Tonga and some initial discussions on possible law reforms had already begun. Fortunately, I followed PAR principles and asked Poli, as Chair of the Tongan Leitis' Association (TLA), what would be the most useful area of research for his community. He replied that housing insecurity was an issue

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[2] This thesis will use words such as rainbow, queer, LGBTIAQ+ and SOGI interchangeably as umbrella terms to include a diverse range of sexualities, sex characteristics and gender identities.

experienced by a number of their younger and older members, and this was an area they hoped to address and would appreciate outside assistance. I therefore put aside my own research interests and embraced a topic which was new to me, but a more pressing issue for the leiti community at that time.

Thanks to the generosity of a research grant from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in October 2019 I was able to travel to Tonga for five weeks and had the privilege of working alongside Poli and the Tongan Leitis' Association executive team, to interview their members on the causes of, and solutions to housing insecurity for leiti. We interviewed 20 leiti across Tongatapu and Vava'u Islands. The stories they shared with us were often deeply personal and moving. We laughed, cried, and partied together as we journeyed through the project. We gained insights into Tongan society and the complex and diverse lives of leiti.

During the last week of my time in Tonga I was invited by the New Zealand embassy in Tonga to share my initial findings with a group of community and NGO leaders. About 50 came and packed out the embassy's small seminar room. This level of engagement showed that the lives of leiti and the challenges they faced, was of interest to both local Tongan leaders and international development workers.

In the spirit of action research, this project will continue past the life of this thesis. Following the completion of this thesis, I also prepared a more concise research report which will be reviewed and revised by my TLA collaborative partners. When we have finalised the text, we will submit our findings to the Tongan government through the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and to the New Zealand government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). We hope that this report will provide an evidential basis to demonstrate the need for tangible changes which will support leiti and will inform future development projects.

Thesis approach

I have been deeply influenced by the work of Dr James (Jamie) Burford both in my professional and academic work. He was a personal mentor to me during my undergraduate studies and I then succeeded him in his role as Queer Support Coordinator at the University of Otago when he pursued his academic career. His MA thesis (Burford, 2010) inspired me to take a more personal and reflective tone as I wrote this thesis, and like Jamie I sought to adopt the perspective of a 'vulnerable author' (Behar, 1996), an approach which encouraged me to be honest and true to my life experiences which have influenced this project.

I have undertaken this project because of who am I, what I value, and how I see the world. I have worked in youth, community, and queer development sectors for the last ten years because as Behar (1996,

p177) puts it; if it does not "break your heart, it isn't worth doing." Within my professional and academic practice, I have been guided by Henri Nouwen's concept of the 'wounded healer' (Martin, 2010). This is someone whose motivation to support others comes from harm(s) they have experienced previously. This informs their work and gives them greater compassion and empathy for those who suffer similar harm(s).

As such I choose to write much of this dissertation in the first-person, with a style which is embodied, passionate, and honest about how the project is mediated by my own experiences. This is informed by Pelias (1999) who warns that attempts to write dispassionately in the third person are problematic as:

1) Analysis is always filtered through a receiving agent,
2) Analysis can never exhaust its subject.

While neither point is particularly novel, Pelias' research does neatly sum up a postmodern approach to social science research.

A specific postmodern approach that informed the writing of this thesis, is *queering*. In this case queering is to reinterpret or deviate from the norm or expected. It questions fixed identity and false binaries. It takes experience of structural marginalisation and uses this experience to critically interrogate other structures which may oppress (Cornwall et al., 2009; Jolly, 2000). As a queer person, who passionately supports the queer community, I cannot help but write a queer thesis. In doing so I hope to gently challenge ideas about what an 'academic' thesis should 'look'' and 'sound' like.

Queering is an analytical lens which can be turned to any number of subject areas and has become increasingly prevalent in development studies. Kapoor (2015, p1612) writes that ideas of 'queer' and 'Third World' have complementary characteristics as:

> Both arise from a history of subjugation, attempting to resist and destabilise domination and the power of the status quo. Both operate from the margins, questioning normalising power mechanisms and social order, while upholding a deviant, non-conformist and non-assimilationist politics. And both are associated with equally negative and disparaging discursive connotations – the one attempting to reclaim such meanings in favour of a radical politics, the other stemming from a (failed) progressive politics of development that now awaits recuperation.

While there has been growing interest in understanding how queer theory can influence development theory and practice, Mawdsley (2020, p229) argues that this "is still overwhelmingly Euro-American." This western centrism means that indigenous queer identities can be made invisible within academic literature. This thesis is written by a white, cis-gender, male, middle class, palangi and so can only be

viewed a product of 'western' academia. It will, however, attempt to amplify the voices and agency of Pacific leiti by following the guidance of PAR principles.

It is therefore my hope that the informal, first-person, narrative language used throughout this thesis will strike a balance between creating an interesting, accessible text that still holds academic value and validity. By doing so I aim to create a more valuable and effective platform to share the voices of my participants. This should also have a positive impact on the 'action' aspect of this project.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis will firstly set out the context of the research by exploring the history and current political, economic, and social situation in the Kingdom of Tonga (chapter two). Chapter three will show that current literature on leiti experience is patchy, problematic, and usually written about with a Western lens. It will examine the role of the Tongan Leitis' Association and examine Pacific approaches to wellbeing. It will broadly define housing insecurity and show that this is impacted by numerous social and economic factors.

Chapter four will explore the theory and methodology that influenced this research project. It will examine a range of theories including indigenous approaches. It will also highlight the importance of reflexivity to this kind of development research. Chapter five will outline how the research process was implemented. This will include information about financial assistance, the Human Ethics Committee application process, as well as outlining how I spent my time in Tonga. It includes reflections on what went well and what challenged the research process.

Chapter six presents the findings of the research and mostly consists of verbatim quotes from participants loosely grouped into themes. I am committed to ensuring the participants' voices come through clearly in this section with minimal analysis. This ensures that they can 'speak for themselves.' Chapter seven links the findings to the literature and highlights areas of development from previous research and fills in some gaps in the literature.

Chapter eight provides some concluding thoughts and recommendations for action that would support leiti to be more socially accepted and therefore have greater housing security.

Conclusion

Overall, I hope and pray that this thesis stands as a testament of the strong, resilient, witty, and loving leiti friends who I met during my short time in Tonga. I hope their voices speak through these pages and represent their complex and inspiring stories. I hope you the reader can gain some insight into their

experiences and that you will be positively impacted by this knowledge. I especially hope that this research can contribute to positive, structural change for leiti.

Chapter Two- Context: The Kingdom of Tonga

"We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands but in the greatness of our oceans.

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous.

We are the sea, we are the ocean. Oceania is us."

- Professor 'Epeli Hau'ofa (1994)

Introduction

There is an expectation that a development thesis of his nature will include a chapter setting out the context of the research. This is usually full of facts and figures and aims to inform the reader about the country, the community, and the people involved in the research. These statistics are taken from a range of sources but usually rely heavily on government data.

I have provided such an outline in this thesis, but I wish to offer a word of caution to the reader before proceeding. This data has been created for a purpose and therefore has limitations. A lot of the data is generated to inform a global audience and to compare Tonga to other countries. It has especially been created for the international development community so that this sector can understand what 'problems' or 'issues' are faced by the Kingdom of Tonga.

This is often deficit-based analysis and provides a deficit-focused window into the life of everyday Tongans. I am wary about replicating these kinds of narratives and so have aimed to strike a balance between providing raw data and narrative contextual information. I encourage the reader to engage with this chapter recognising that this information is limited, selective, and partial in nature.

I aim to provide relevant information to ground the reader in understanding the context which this research took place and to help the reader analyse the findings. It includes statistical information on Tonga's population, land mass, education, economic situation, religious context, and history. I explore in more detail key Tongan values that relate to this research the way Tonga has applied the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the relationship between the housing/land situation and gender based violence (GBV).

I challenge the reader to read critically through this section, recognising my own biases and prejudices in selecting this information. I encourage you to wonder with me how different this section might look if it were written by someone born and raised in Tonga.

Country Profile

Tonga is a Kingdom in the Pacific Ocean consisting of 171 islands of which 40 are permanently inhabited. Nuku'alofa, the capital, is located on the island of Tongatapu which is the most populous island followed

by Vava'u, Ha'apai, and 'Eua. Nuku'alofa is 890 km due south of Apia, Samoa; 750 km southeast of Suva, Fiji; and 2,000 km northeast of Auckland, New Zealand (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019). This research occurred on two of Tonga's 'main' islands, Tongatapu and Vava'u.

The 2016 census identified the population of Tonga at 100,651 people: 50,255 were male and 50,396 were identified as female. The census does not include questions relating to gender diversity and so the number of leiti living in Tonga is unknown. Tonga's population is decreasing at a rate of -0.5% per year due to high rates of immigration. Tonga has a relatively young population, with a median age of 22 years. More than one third (39%) of the population was aged 15 years and younger, while only 9% were 60 years and older (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2017).

In 2016, 74% of Tonga's population was living in Tongatapu with Vava'u having 14% of the population, Ha'apai 6%, 'Eua 5%, and Ongo Niua 1%. These percentages are similar to what was observed in 2011. According to the 2016 census, Tonga's average population density was 155 people/km2. This was significantly higher in the more urban 'main' island of Tongatapu which has 286 people/km2 (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019).

Literacy was measured by asking people to rate their ability to read and write in Tongan and English. In the 2016 census, English literacy competency was observed to increase from around 60% in 2011 for age group 6–9 years, to over 97% for age group 10–14 years for both males and females. Improvements were also observed in Tongan literacy over the same age range from 90% for age group 6–9 years to 99% for age group 10–14 years (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019).

Tonga is a very religious country, and most of its citizens identify as Christian. Methodism is the dominant religion in Tonga, with 35% of the population (35,082 members) affiliated with the Free Wesleyan Church (Table 21 and Fig. 18). The Church of Latter-Day Saints is the second largest, with 18,673 members (19% of the population) followed by the Roman Catholic Church with 14% (14,276 members), the Free Church of Tonga with 12% (11,896 members), and the Church of Tonga with 7% (6,868 members) (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019).

Close to 90% of households used mobile telephones in all divisions, except for Ongo Niua where mobile telephones were used by 78% of households. Access to technology, in the form of laptops, tablets, and personal computers had increased. In 2016, 38% of private households in Tonga had a laptop, 18% a tablet, and 9% a desktop computer (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019).

Tonga was once composed of a loose association of semi-autonomous chiefdoms which were united in the 19th century due to the work of Wesleyan missionaries and a young warrior called Tāufaʻāhau. In 1845 he was baptised with the name King George Tupou I, and declared Tonga a constitutional monarchy (Tongia,1998). In 1875 the newly formed kingdom set in a place a national constitution which was also heavily influenced by the early Christian missionaries.

This constitution enforced a class system which replaced the traditional chieftainship and eldership roles with the new social ranks of aristocracy (*hou'eiki*), chiefs (*mu'a eiki*) and commoners (*tu'a*). Salomon (2008) writes that this class system is so ingrained in Tongan society that it is unlikely to be challenged in the near future. This is due to the way 'commoners' take pride in their humility and the way this system extends to family units. The head of a family will make decisions about marriages and land, while still being submissive to people of higher rank.

Influence of Christianity

In 1873 King George Tupou I famously proclaimed 'Ko e ʻOtua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofiʻa' which means 'God and Tonga are my inheritance' (Marcus, 1978). This saying is still common in Tonga and is foundational to law and culture which combines Christianity with indigenous Tongan culture. Recent official government documents illustrate this reality, for example this 2015 Tonga Ministry of Finance paper states:

> These (values) are based around our deep Christian faith, and focus on stability, the maintenance of good relationships built on respect, reciprocal respect, reciprocity/sharing, humility, love/care, and duty. These are central to our tradition as Tongans. But we know they are changing under other influences. Our traditional values draw on our ancient history as a people, modified in part by the reforms of Tupou I.

Some of these values are being tested, especially due to the impact of migration. The large population movements within Tonga, and between Tonga and the rest of the world bring new ideas, values, and behaviours. Some of these are welcomed by the society whereas others are treated with suspicion and derision. Ideas such as LGBTIAQ+ human rights and gender equality are notions which are viewed as modern, foreign, and promiscuous, and therefore incompatible with Tongan culture (Cama and Toailoa 2017; Zemke 2019).

Another example of how cultural Christianity significantly impacts public policy in Tonga was in 2015 when the government announced that it would ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General

Assembly in 1979 and Tonga remains one of six countries who have yet to ratify it. The government presented their statement of ratification in March 2015 calling it a 'historic day.' Tonga's statement included a clause allowing it to "retain its laws preventing same-sex marriage and abortion as well as its constitutional provisions for succession to the throne and noble titles" (Lee, 2017, p68). Even these reservations were not enough to prevent widespread protests against ratification and petitions to the King.

Lady 'Ainise Sevele, who is the wife of former Prime Minister Lord Feleti Sevele, was a key leader in the protests and said to the media:

> We know our place in our society. Women have a big voice in the running of the family, but the man has to make the final decision. In any other country they will challenge that, but in Tonga we don't. We were born into it and we know the benefits of just having one master in the household (Munro 2015).

This illustrates the power of conservative Christian ideology to define 'traditional' Tongan gender relations. Public opposition was so strong that by September 2015 the Government announced that it had withdrawn its intention to ratify CEDAW and would instead explore putting it to a referendum.

While strong opposition ultimately led to the defeat of CEDAW ratification in Tonga, many Tongans were in favour of ratifying the CEDAW and the democratically elected government did come close to passing it into law. Salesa (2017) encourages us to avoid mistakenly believing in a 'singular Pacifika voice' as this misguidedly becomes that of older Pacifika men and erases other community voices.

Tanu Gago is a Samoan Fa'afafine activist who shows that even though conservative Christianity is a loud voice against equity reforms, it remains important to gender diverse Pacifika young people today:

> Our young people are embedded in religious frameworks; it's part of their culture and their identity and just because they identify this way [queer] doesn't mean they've abandoned those values. It's still very much a part of their life and I feel that's reflected in the landscape, these two things coexist geographically the same way they do within our young people (Moata-Cox, 2014).

I also noticed this during my time in Tonga as most leiti I spoke to were still involved in their churches and some had duties such as flower arranging and serving at the altar. As a queer Christian palangi, I knew that faith/ religion was a topic that I was going to have to very carefully navigate as we undertook this research project due to its importance in Tongan culture.

Tongan values

Key Tongan values have been articulated as *Faa'i Kaveikoula 'a e Tonga* or Tonga's four golden pillars which guide Tongan society. They are:

- Faka'apa'apa: mutual respect
- Anga fakatokilalo/loto tō: humility, generosity and openness to learning
- Tauhi vaha'a/vā: gratitude and loyalty
- Mamahi'i me'a: commitment and passion (Latukefu, 1980, p60).

The Pasefika Proud (2012, p6) resource *Fofola e fala kae talanoa e kāinga* (Roll out the mats so the family can dialogue) states that "'Ofa (love and care, kindness) is the philosophical ground upon which Faa'i Kaveikoula 'a e Tonga (Tonga's Pillars) stand." Kalolaine Katoa Mafi (2018) sites *fāmili* (family) as the primary space where these values are taught and upheld. Commitment and loyalty to family is therefore an especially important aspect of Tongan life. This value has implications for leiti for whom their *fāmili* are no longer safe people to be with. Leaving *fāmili* often seems impossible for leiti even if they are experiencing significant violence from them.

While these values may be constraining in some situations, they may also provide a fertile site for situating future development initiatives which seek to reduce stigma and generate empathy towards the leiti community. This will be explored further in chapter seven.

Socioeconomic situation

The Tongan economy is based on small business, civil service, remittances, and foreign aid (Good, 2014). Unlike many other Pacific nations whose economies rely heavily on international tourism, Tonga does not have a well-developed tourist sector. This partially explains why Tonga's economic performance by GDP is often significantly lower than other Pacific Island countries (Asia Development Bank, 2018), and why government resources are under strain. Farran (2014, p350) posits that this financial situation is the probable cause of a lack of government services including welfare, social housing, or legal support because "the state provides few such benefits, if any."

During the 12 months prior to the 2016 census, 63% percent of Tonga's population aged 15 years and older were in the labour force or economically active. Wages and/or salaries were the main source (46%) of household incomes. The second most common source was income from selling their own products such as fish, crops, or handicrafts (20%) (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019). Subsistence work, such as producing goods for individual or family consumption, was the main source of work for 14.5% of Tongan males and 9.1% of females. About 81% of households received remittances during the 12 months prior to the census. Only 6,650 people were categorized as being unemployed (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2017).

The United Nations multi-variable Human Development Index (HDI) provides a broader measure than GDP or other income per capita, which only measures standard of living. Between 1980 and 1995 Tonga's HDI progress was similar to countries such as Malaysia, and similar to Fiji's until 2005. HDI progress from 2005 has continued but at a slower rate with Tonga falling from 54th out of 177 countries and territories in 2005, to 104th out of 189 countries in 2019 (Tongan Ministry of Finance, 2015).

The international poverty measure for extreme poverty is USD$1.90 per person per day. Between 2009 and 2019, the percentage of population in this category has increased from 1% to 3% (Kingdom of Tonga, 2019). According to the Asian Development Bank (2012) Tonga is highly vulnerable to food insecurity due to the high percentage of imported food (25% of total imports) and the high proportion of household income being spent on food both in rural and urban areas (52%).

This economic information indicates that while Tongans have a reasonable standard of living and few live in extreme poverty, the ability for the government to leverage significant taxes in order to conduct social programmes such as housing, is very limited.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Kingdom of Tonga is committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To do so the government created a roadmap called the Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF II) 2015-2025. This roadmap aims to drive more inclusive and sustainable development in the following seven ways:

1. Dynamic knowledge-based economy
2. Urban and rural development across all island groups
3. Empowering human development with gender equality
4. Responsive and good governance with law and order
5. Successful provision and maintenance of infrastructure and technology
6. Effective land administration, environment management, and resilience to climate and risk
7. Sustainable and consistent advancement of our external interests, security, and sovereignty. (Tonga Ministry of Finance, 2015).

In November 2015, Tonga undertook a process to align the seventeen SDGs to these seven National Outcomes of the TSDF II. They tried to strike a balance between the international aims of the SDGs and the more culturally specific aims to TSDF II. The government hoped to create a cohesive approach to achieving the SDGs through this framework.

The National Impact sought by TSDF II is: "A more progressive Tonga supporting a higher quality of life for all." The framework defines progressive as being "better suited to the needs of the modern World, is better able to maintain its essential foundations while being able to adjust to, and make greater use of, changing conditions." It states clearly that this is not a "simple copying of what the so-called 'developed countries' are like." Because "to gain the modern world but to lose our inheritance would not bring the impact we seek" (Tonga Ministry of Finance, 2015, p50).

This highlights a key tension played out in Tongan politics and development projects: holding on to the traditions and values it identifies with, while embracing globalisation and sustainable development opportunities. In many ways the lives of leiti sit at the very centre of this tension. This will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

According to the 2019 Voluntary National Review (Kingdom of Tonga, 2019, p21) Tonga's approach to the SDGs includes the principle of leaving no one behind. This has been categorized into four main areas including 1) remote communities; 2) persons with disability; 3) the elderly, adolescents, and children and 4) people with diverse sexual orientation. This document states that the government partners with the Tonga Leitis' Association, to "implement awareness on gender issues, and screening programs for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases." Feedback from leiti during the interview process (see chapter six) indicate that this relationship ought to be strengthened and the government could be more active in supporting leitis.

Another focus of the government's work on sustainable development relates to gender equality and reducing violence against women and girls. A National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Tonga found high prevalence of violence and abuse in Tonga with three out of four women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lives by a partner or non-partner (Jansen, 2012). There is no national level data on violence against leiti although the findings of this research project suggests that it is very common (see chapter six). This issue is expanded upon in the gender based violence (GBV) subsection below.

Housing

The 2016 census found that the majority of private households (64%) owned[3] their dwelling, 5% rented their dwelling, and another 24% stayed in their dwelling rent-free. About 58% of private households lived in dwellings with wooden outside walls, and 38% of private households occupied dwellings with

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[3] 'Owned' means that someone in the household had title to the land, as all land is legally owned by the King of Tonga.

concrete block walls. Between the 2011 and 2016 censuses, concrete blocks increased as a material used for outside walls (from 31% to 38%), while wood has decreased in use (from 61% to 58%). This trend commenced with the reconstruction of dwellings damaged in the tsunami which occurred on 30 September 2009 (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2019).

In 2011, 92% of households on the main island of Tongatapu had piped water supply. Most (93%) had mains supplied electricity for their lighting, the rest using kerosene, benzene, solar, or some other lighting supply. Gas was used by 60% Tongatapu households for cooking, and wood fuel was significant for 36% of households. 92% of urban households had flushing toilets (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2011).

Land tenure

Tonga is one of the few Pacific Island countries which do not have customary title as the basis of land use. Instead, the 1988 Revised Constitution allocates all land to the crown:

> 104. Land vested in crown

> All the land is the property of the King and he may at pleasure grant to the nobles and titular chiefs or matapules one or more estates to become their hereditary estates. It is hereby declared by this Constitution that it shall not be lawful for anyone at any time hereafter whether he be the King or any one of the chiefs or the people of this country to sell any land whatever in the Kingdom of Tonga but they may lease it only in accordance with this Constitution and mortgage it in accordance with the Land Act. And this declaration shall become a covenant binding on the King and chiefs of this Kingdom for themselves and their heirs and successors for ever (Kennedy, 2012).

Not all Tongans are happy with this situation as land tenure was a significant part of the pro-democracy movement's grievances which led to the 2006 uprising. This uprising caused the destruction of a number of buildings in Nulu'alofa and forced a motion of no confidence in the government.

Land use is a particularly complex and emotion-laden topic in Tonga due to its historical context. King George Tupou I observed the colonisation of other Pacific Island countries in the mid-1800s and wanted to protect his Kingdom. He also visited Australia and observed the poverty of Aboriginal Australians as a result of their land being taken from them. He therefore banned the sale of land to foreigners and initiated a set of legal codes that would remove power from chiefs and created a pathway for commoners to access land (Salomon, 2009).

While all land is technically owned by the crown, it is allocated in variety of ways in accordance with the revised 1988 Constitution and the 1988 Land Act. Commoners have access to this land by being

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allocated allotments in both town (for dwellings) and in rural areas for subsistence or agricultural use. Prior to 1981, every Tongan male received land on their 16th birthday. However, this practice has since ceased due to land shortage. Land is handed down to the first-born male of the property owner as per the Constitution.

Leiti are technically able to inherit land as they are viewed as males by law. This may not always be the case within the family as sometimes leiti are bullied out of their inheritance by family members. At a meeting with my TLA collaborative partners on 24 September 2019[4], Poli mentioned that some families will not pass down land to their leiti sons as they think 'you won't have a family, why do you need land?' Poli also reaffirmed the spiritual connection between Tongans and the land, noting a common saying was 'land can bite you.' He explains that this saying is a warning to respect land, and engage in land dealings fairly, otherwise there could be serious consequences.

The gendered connection of men to the land is further reinforced through the division of labour as women are generally seen as responsible for running the household, and men are responsible for farming their rural allotment. This creates a gender equality issue which has been challenged through discussions surrounding CEDAW.

Gender based violence (GBV)

Sumeo (2017, p188) demonstrates a direct link between the disconnection of women from land ownership, to increased risks of gender based violence (GBV). This is due to women's lack of economic independence which prevents them from leaving an abusive spouse. One of her informants (a support worker at the Crisis Centre) said that "more than 80% of its domestic violence clients, and we are talking about women, return to the violent environment because there is no other option." This research project revealed that leiti experience similar challenges and also feel like they often have no other option but to stay in violent situations (see chapter six).

The 2019 report *Gender equality: Where do we stand?* by Tonga's Ministry of Internal Affairs Women's Affairs Division, found that gender based violence (GBV) was high in the Kingdom. It reported that 2/3 women had experienced physical violence by someone other than a partner since they were 15 years old. The main perpetrators were fathers and teachers.

There is some initial research that leiti are a specific target of GBV in Tonga. This comes in forms of harassment, bullying, abuse, and sexual and physical violence based on their gender identity. The sites

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[4] Personal research journal entry dated 24 September 2019.

of this violence include family homes, schools, public spaces, and even at church events (Pacific Sexual Diversity Network, 2009). James (1994) observed that 'effeminate' boys were beaten up in an attempt to make them more 'manly' and conversely could also be a target of sexual abuse.

Other than these two references, there is a distinct lack of information about the health and wellbeing of LGBTIAQ+ people in the Pacific. This has been noted by other researchers such as Sorensen and Jensen (2017). The findings of this research project provide a much needed window into the lives and wellbeing of leiti and shows that violence is pervasive during the early years of many leiti.

The Government of Tonga has focused on addressing GBV over the last decade, passing the 2013 Family Protection Act and establishing a Domestic Violence Unit within the Tongan police. A lot of prevention work is also carried out by NGOs such as the National Centre for Women and Children (Sumeo, 2017). They provide a drop-in centre which supports female survivors of violence. The TLA provides similar informal support for leiti, although preventing violence or responding to violence against leiti is not explicitly a major focus of their work.

Conclusion

This section aimed to provide contextual information about the Kingdom of Tonga, Tongan society, and Tongan people. It included a history and overview of economic data, religion, housing and land use, and gender based violence. I flagged in the introduction to this chapter that the information would be limited, selective, and partial. While I hope it informed the reader, I also hope the reader took up my challenge to be critical of the content and question the kind of information which was provided, why it was included, and what (who) might be missing?

While this chapter provided background information, it also revealed that there is a distinct lack of information relating specifically to leiti or other LGBTIAQ+ individuals in Tonga. Partly this is due to a lack of government interest or willingness to collect this data, as well as a lack of academic focus on the wellbeing of leiti. This research project offers some insights into the wellbeing of leiti which are novel and contribute to the academy's understanding of their lives.

Chapter Three -Leiti lives and the challenges they face

"Maybe the body is the only question an answer can't extinguish."

- Ocean Vuong (2016)

Introduction

On the 9th of July 1986 the Homosexual Law Reform Act passed in Aotearoa New Zealand to the cheers of pro-bill supporters who packed the public gallery. It passed despite stiff opposition, including a public petition with over 835,000 signatures (Evans, Laurie, & Lesbian & Gay Archives of New Zealand, 2009). Since this time Aotearoa has experienced a major cultural shift where same-gender relationships are now generally accepted. This widespread culture change culminated with the passing of marriage equality legislation in 2013.

These kinds of law reforms are not occurring at the same rate globally as documented by the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA) which, in 2017, reported that 72 states still criminalised same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults (Carroll & Mendos, 2017). Some of those included Pacific Island countries with close links to Aotearoa, specifically the Cook Islands, Samoa, and Tonga.

The call for law reform in the Pacific has recently gained greater visibility through the release of the film *Leitis in Waiting* (Bloodworth, 2018). This film explored the lives of leitis in Tonga and their work to secure legislative change to protect their rights and a desire for greater cultural acceptance. Part of this project included an online petition which circulated amongst the LGBTIAQ+ community in Aotearoa and helped raise the visibility of challenges experienced by our rainbow siblings in the Pacific.

This chapter will explore how western 'outsiders' have constructed an (often problematic) academic understanding of sexual and gender diversity within Pacific nations. It will explore what it means to be leiti within the Tongan context and provide some insight into the work of the Tongan Leitis' Association (TLA). The chapter will then explore what insights the literature can provide as to holistic wellbeing within a Pacific context and how that has informed this research project. Finally, it will cover housing insecurity within a development context and how the existing literature has struggled to define this.

This chapter will show that research about leiti, and the challenges they face, is patchy, fragmented, and problematic. It will illustrate the areas of knowledge that this research project can contribute to and identify areas requiring further research.

Research into sexuality and gender diversity in the Pacific has been obscured by western academic mythmaking driven by a history of western imperialism. Ethnographers, missionaries, and tourism promoters have all contributed to mythologising the sexual freedom of Polynesians (Tcherkezoff, 2014). Call to mind a tourism advertisement you have seen for a Pacific country. It is likely to involve a muscled, topless, Pacific young man dressed in a grass skirt and spinning a fire staff. It will likely also include a demure, beautiful, long-haired youthful Pacific woman, dancing in style that would call to mind a 'hula girl.' These kinds of advertisements promote a romantic and sexualised narrative of what a 'Pacific Island Getaway' might involve (Opperman, 1997).

The reason these myths are so enduring is often attributed to the work of cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead who studied adolescents in Samoa (Mead, 1961). Her work painted a picture of "free love" amongst Samoans, especially during adolescence. Mead contended that Samoans were "permissive of same-sex play" amongst adolescents and particularly noted one twenty-year-old man who made regular advances to other male youth (Alexeyoff & Besnier, 2014).

Mead's work is likely to have been informed by the vivid and judgement-laden accounts of early missionaries. Orsmond (1849, p2) was a prominent leader in the London Missionary Society (LMS) who was sent to Tahiti to expand missionary work there. He began his first report to head office, by labelling Tahiti as the 'filthy Sodom of the South Seas' due to his observations of a variety of sexual conduct which he viewed as deviant. He noted that "on her shores chastity and virtue find no place. The predominant theme of conversation from youth to old age is the filthy coition of the sexes." These observations included same-sex acts: "the men leaving the natural use of the woman, burn in their lusts towards another, men with men working that which is unseemly" (cited in Besnier, 1994, p291).

Other early western observers noted the links between gender and sexual diversity in the Pacific. In 1789, William Bligh (cited in Wallace, 2018, p14) described a group of people in Tahiti he called the Mahoo (Mahu):

> These people… are particularly selected when Boys and kept with the Women solely for the carnesses [sic] of the men… The Women treat him as one of their Sex, and he observed evry [sic] restriction that they do, and is equally respected and esteemed.

Some early accounts of gender diversity in the Pacific came from sailors who report being 'tricked' by the natives into sexual encounters with 'boys' who from the outside seemed to be 'girls'. One early example in a 1789 journal entry from a sailor on James Cook's *Endeavour* (cited in Besnier, 1994, p292) reported this contact with Māori:

He had been with a family of Indians and paid a price for leave to make his addresses to any one young woman they should pitch upon him; one was chose as he thought who willingly retired with him but on examination provd to be a boy; that on his returning and complaining another was sent who tumd [sic] out to be a boy likewise.

Robert Levy's (1973) research explored Pacific gender diversity in more detail by examining the identities of Tahitians. Levy argued that Tahitian masculinity required a third gender identity (māhū) to define itself against. For example, a Tahitian man knew he was 'manly' because he was not like the māhū. This functionalist approach to understanding gender diversity in the Pacific has since been widely challenged as academics recognised the complexity of these identities and recognised that they were innate (Alexeyoff & Besnier, 2014).

Reevan Dolgoy's (2014) work into the history of the fa'afafine movement in Samoa focuses on the period between 1960 and 1980 during which they gained greater visibility. This he argues is due to increasing urbanisation and the creation of a 'safe space' at a tailoring workshop they dubbed 'Hollywood.' It was here that Fa'afafine were able to gather, mentor each other, and engage in paid employment, thereby building a sense of group identity. He labelled this a 'gentle politics of recognition' as over time their visibility increased, and society became increasingly more comfortable with their presence.

One of the issues for a western 'outsider' is understanding the complex relationship between sexuality and gender identities in Pacific Island countries. Discreet western notions of sex, sexuality, and gender identity do not directly overlap with Pacific identities such fa'afafine, fakaleiti, māhū, or the third gender identity of 'qauri' in Fiji. Pacific efforts to distinguish the uniqueness of indigenous sexual and gender identities have become stronger in recent years, especially following Phylesha Brown-Acton's speech quoted in the preface.

Geir Henning Presterudstuen (2014) examined this blurring of gender and sexuality in his research in Suva, Nadi, and Lautoka. He found that a qauri identity is defined in relation to traditional understanding of masculinity and femininity. A traditional Fijian view is that men ought to be masculine, dominant, and perform penetrative sexual acts, whereas women ought to be demure, submissive, and the receptive sexual partner. People who are assigned male at birth but fall outside of these stereotypes are often labelled as qauri. Presterudstuen recognised three subcategories of qauri: those who were transgender and identified as women, secondly effeminate gay men, and finally men who have sex with men (MSM) but did not fit effeminate gay stereotypes. Other researchers have argued that it is more accurate to understand these characteristics as spectrums or continuums as this is more appropriate than limiting them to three categories.

While there are number of identities in the Pacific that relate to people assigned male at birth but who express themselves in ways which are coded as feminine, we need to avoid viewing them homogenously. Each identity is unique and are heterogeneously expressed within its indigenous context (Schoeffel, 2014).

Unfortunately, as noted by Zemke (2019), there is a significant lack of research into the lives of Pacific people who were assigned female at birth but now identify or express themselves in a masculine way. This research project did interview two people who identified this way, and their experiences are detailed in subsequent chapters. These identities would benefit from greater recognition both from researchers and civil society as they are often 'hidden' and therefore likely to miss out on support and development opportunities.

Construction of leiti identity

Niko Besnier (1994) is an ethnographer who has spent a significant time in Tonga studying 'fakaleiti' and has provided a western academic foundation for understanding their identity since the early 90s. Besnier understands 'fakaleiti' as biological males who express themselves in an effeminate or woman-like way. *Faka* in the Tongan language means 'in the fashion of' and *leiti* is a transliteration of the English word lady. In this sense fakaleiti literally means 'like a lady.' This label was likely to have been imposed on certain gender-diverse Tongans, as a form of ridicule. As such, most prefer the shortened version *leiti.* Leiti also reject the fakaleiti label as they do not see themselves as men pretending to be women, rather they identify as a separate and unique gender, called leiti. For these reasons I will predominantly use leiti as the preferred term throughout the thesis.

Defining what it means to be leiti externally is a difficult task. Besnier noted in 1997 (p11) that "leiti identity is by definition in a state of constant diachronic flux". This means that we should be wary of overly simplistic definitions or attempts at categorisation. He argues that leiti identity is continually evolving due to globalisation and the exchange of people and culture from surrounding western countries. This constant change requires academics to revisit earlier research to ensure that knowledge is still relevant.

Leiti generally express themselves in a stereotypically feminine way, and often prefer feminine-coded activities such as netball, flower arranging, and crafts. Good (2014) shows how leiti in Tonga challenge stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity. She explains that while leiti typically express themselves in feminine ways, the specific way they choose to do so can vary dramatically. This can include style or dress, household roles, style of hair, and the way they express themselves as they are often "perceived to be outspoken and humorous." Some leiti have turned to western celebrities for

inspiration and have emulated the "traits and perceived glamourous lifestyles of globally famous hyper feminine women" (Schmidt, 2003). This illustrates another facet of the complex leiti identity and reinforces the need to avoid simplistic representations.

Because leiti both adopt and reject a wide range of gender-coded characteristics to express themselves, knowing what pronouns to use for people can be difficult. My experience in Tonga was that most leiti I talked to preferred to use the pronouns *she/her* but due to societal limitations they accepted *he/him* pronouns and were not sensitive about pronoun use. A small minority of leiti preferred *he/*him pronouns. Throughout the project I endeavoured to ask participants which pronouns they preferred and have tried to use these pronouns when referring to each participant throughout the thesis.

Due to the influence of early ethnographers including Mead (1961), there is a lasting 'myth' that fa'afafine and leiti people are a result of families raising 'boys as girls' if the family already has an unequal number of sons. A Pacific identity researcher, Kalissa Alexeyeff (cited in Weedon 2019), said "to me that's the biggest load of b......t." She noted that these identities have also been wrongly labelled as a 'third gender' but they actually represent a "spectrum of expression and identity." She explained that "some fakaleitī, fa'afafine and akava'ine would consider themselves women, but others would consider themselves trans, or both."

This research project reinforces Alexeyeff's claim and shows that leiti identify their gender identity very early in life and that it is not in any way imposed on them. Most of them faced great adversity when they initially expressed their gender identities and most families tried to make them more masculine rather than supporting their leiti identities. This is explored further in chapter six.

The influence of western sexual and gender definitions also impacts leiti identity. A great deal of funding for the work of the Tongan Leitis' Association (TLA) is focussed on HIV/Aids prevention and education. This brings with it a western vocabulary of LGBTIAQ+/SOGIC/rainbow terminology. Accompanying these terms are the western framing of identity being broken down into spectrums of sex characteristics, sexual attraction, gender identity, and gender expression.

These 'imported' ideas provide both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is the connection to the global rainbow world of NGOs and activists which can bring useful support and resources. The challenge for leiti is that these ideas are foreign and often do not fit in well with a Tongan worldview. These concepts can 'objectify' leiti and focus disproportionately on bodies and sexual practice. This can lead to stigma and disproportionately associate leiti with sexual disease.

The Tonga Leitis' Association (TLA) has a complex history. Its social media describes it as "a history of survival; a history that has been filled with diverse and contesting ways of understanding, filled with contradictions, categorisation, labelling and marginalisation" (Tongan Leitis' Association, n.d.). The TLA emerged as a response to societal oppression of leiti as they fell outside 'Anga FakaTonga' ('normal' Tongan ways). Some leiti characteristics and behaviours are perceived by some as unacceptable and morally wrong.

The TLA was established in the early 2000s and is committed to encouraging Tonga and Tongans to see leitis in a more positive light, recognising their positive contributions to Tongan society through their business ventures, family involvement, and being an important part of expressing Tongan culture. The TLA works alongside the Ministry of Health and a range of NGO's to provide crucial HIV prevention and testing services. They also support leitis into professional training and job opportunities. The TLA is committed to international participation in a range of ways, "including encouraging members to take up scholarship opportunities to study overseas" (ibid).

In May 2013, the TLA celebrated the opening of its drop-in Centre *Ofa he Paea*, which means 'love for those in need'. The name of the centre was chosen by the Hon Salote Lupepau'u Tuita, who is the daughter of the Princess of Tonga HRH Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita and is also the Patron of the Centre. The name reflects the reality that many leitis are shunned by society and neglected by their families (Apcom, 2012).

Princess HRH Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita gave a keynote address which highlighted the excellent work of the TLA and the need for a more inclusive attitude to Lieti. In attendance were members from the Diplomatic Corp, Government Ministers, Community Leaders, NGOs, and the wider Tongan community. The centre is seen as a 'safe haven' for leiti, where training workshops can be delivered on topics such as Human Rights, health, and wellbeing. It was the first of its kind in the Pacific and is solely funded by the TLA and operated by its members (ibid).

At a research planning meeting which included members of the TLA Executive Committee and myself on 24 September 2019, a member called Manase provided a summary of the current work of the TLA and which international partners support this work. These are notes from my research journal which document his overview:[5]

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[5] Personal research journal entry dated 24 September 2019.

- *The Global Fund, provide a big piece of funding to do HIV awareness raising and supporting testing initiatives in conjunction with other NGOs and Ministry of Health. Have specific targets for trans and MSM.[6] MSM are harder to get to because they are secret. There is a tricky aspect to this funding as it links HIV to the TLA in the public perception. This is despite HIV being a minor issue in Tonga, only 3-4 people living with HIV in Tonga. This funding covers the majority of TLA's core operating costs.*
- *NZ Aid provides some funds for netball competitions and for the annual Miss Galaxy pageant. Noted this is a relationship which could be expanded. I will do my best to connect Poli and Ryan.[7] There is a possibility of using the Child and Youth Wellbeing framework to build on this.*
- *Canada Aid, Phase One of Law reform project. This involved 3 consultations with church leaders at different locations on Tongatapu. Not as many came as they hoped.*
- *US Aid, they have received funds from the US to continue this work and hope to build on this relationship. They haven't confirmed the direction of this yet and will need to choose whether to pursue change to anti-sodomy or cross-dressing laws.*
- *The Secretariat for the Pacific Community (RRRT) have provided funds to conduct a survey of their members and build a database. This should help with funding applications.*
- *AUS Aid, have provided funds for a health project and for Miss Galaxy.*
- *Edge Effect came for a week to collect stories of leiti experiences. This was to produce a Pacific-wide report on LGBT experiences to also help funding applications. They haven't seen this report yet.*

This shows the breadth of the projects which the TLA is involved in but also how global partners drive their work. All these funds require administrative work, reporting, and relationship management which can take the TLA staff and volunteers away from their core business. If the TLA had funding which was not tagged to specific donor projects, it is likely their programmes and services would look quite different.

Further oral history of the TLA is provided in chapter six. This chapter also include discussion about whether the TLA should amend its constitution to be more inclusive of sexual and gender diverse people who do not identify as leiti.

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[6] An acronym from the public health sector which stands for Men who have Sex with Men.
[7] Ryan was a contact I made at the New Zealand Embassy in Tonga.

Physical health is a challenge in Tonga. The government's Strategic Development Framework (2015–2025) found that life expectancy in Tonga is decreasing. mostly because of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes (Anderson & Irava, 2017). However physical health is inseparably connected to other aspects of wellbeing for Tongans and any interventions need to understand this holistic wellbeing model.

Wellbeing in Tongan culture requires harmony and balance between one's relationship to people, land, and the spiritual world (Mafile'o, 2005). A simple model which captures this understanding of holistic wellbeing is the Fonofale (Pulotu-Endemann, 2009). The fale is a traditional Pacific dwelling and in this model the roof of the fale represents cultural values and beliefs, the foundation represents family, and the pou (poles which hold up the structure) represent physical, spiritual, and mental wellbeing.

Figure 1- Fonofale Model (Manuela & Sibley, 2013)

Figure 1 shows that the fono of wellbeing in this model is surrounded by time, context, and environment. These situate the key aspects of wellbeing and recognise the ways in which these interact and affect people's wellbeing.

This holistic wellbeing approach is also enshrined in the Government of Tonga's framework of development which states:

> Traditionally, wellbeing, or the quality of life, for Tongans, exists when our relationship with our God, our environment, and other people is in a state of mental, physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual balance. Maintaining our networks and relationships is a central part of

retaining this balance. It is thus essential that the other changes we seek do not undermine these important aspects of our wellbeing (Ministry of Finance, 2015).

This research project incorporates the fonofale model as it explored all aspects of wellbeing, and the surrounding context of the leiti, during each interview. This ensured that any findings about causes of housing insecurity would consider the full picture of the participant's situation and ensure that any recommendations also included this holistic understanding.

As noted in chapter two, family in Tonga is traditionally the primary means of social and financial support for leiti. Sometimes they are excluded from their genetic families due to prejudice or moral concerns. This loss of traditional familial support structures puts them at risk of poverty or homelessness. Farran (2014) suggests that this leads some leiti to migrate to more 'tolerant' countries where their rights are protected. She notes that there is "insufficient data concerning the circumstances under which many transgender immigrate because of actual or feared discrimination at home." This also highlights the gap in academic literature about the wellbeing of leiti.

Ikeda's (2014, p136) work in Hawai'i examines how gender diverse communities often create their own 'chosen' family/community if they have rejected by their biological family. She shows that this can be beneficial to the wellbeing of those individuals but is not the same as being accepted by biological family. The TLA represents chosen family for some leiti in the Tongan context and have provided shelter to those excluded by family.

Ikeda also argues that academics and the media can often miss important research opportunities due to a misguided focus on the 'titillating' rather than "understanding transgender individuals and their everyday lives." This is also true in relation to leiti, whereby current research focuses on sexuality and practices of leiti, rather than their general wellbeing. This research project goes some way to addressing this research 'gap.'

Housing Insecurity

There is a lack of agreement in the literature about what constitutes housing insecurity. At its simplest it is an inability to access safe, healthy, affordable, stable, and appropriate housing (Frederick et al., 2014). Housing insecurity is a well-documented public health concern and is associated with increased negative health outcomes including increased stress, sexual and physical victimization, substance use, and exacerbated mental and physical health conditions (Curry, 2017). There is a lack of research on housing insecurity and homelessness in the developing world as such topics are usually framed within developed countries' contexts (Tipple et al., 2009).

Housing was identified as an important aspect of alleviating poverty through the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements (UNCHS, 1976). The Vancouver Declaration affirmed that "adequate shelter and services are a basic human right which places an obligation on Governments to ensure their attainment by all people … Governments should endeavour to remove all impediments hindering attainment of these goals." (UNCHS, 1976: III, para. 8). The idea of housing as a human right is continuing to gain traction although this is not a focus of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the UN-HABITAT (2016) programme, in 2015 there were estimated to be 1.5 billion people living in insecure, inadequate, and unsafe housing. The key drivers of housing insecurity include joblessness, inadequate incomes, high costs of housing, natural disasters destroying housing stock, stigma and discrimination related to identity, and poor housing and land tenure policies (Mncayi & Steven, 2017). The importance of each driver differs widely between contexts, for example in Aotearoa housing insecurity is linked to high cost of housing and inadequate incomes, whereas in Tonga land tenure policy, natural disasters, and discrimination are more important factors.

The 2019 Kingdom of Tonga National Review recognised that land use was putting pressure on people's access to land for development and housing. It identified issues of "planning and management, combined with inefficient administration of land laws and regulations in Tonga" as causing "inefficient urban and rural development." It recommended that reforms be made to the Land Act 1988 but didn't outline these reforms in detail.

Rapid urbanisation has also been identified as a key driver of housing insecurity. The Urban Institute (2011) identified that urbanisation had left many Pacific Island countries struggling to provide adequate employment, housing, infrastructure, food, and land. Rakodi (2014) notes that barriers to housing can include laws and legal frameworks, social norms and expectations, supply/access to land and housing, and resources to secure safe housing.

There is an emerging field looking into the experiences of LGBTIAQ+ specific housing insecurity. Research conducted by the Williams Institute (2020) found that LGBTIAQ+ youth disproportionately constitute between 20% and 45% of homeless youth in the United States despite being less than 10% of the general population. They also found that queer youth and adults, especially transgender people, face barriers to accessing homeless shelters and services. Glick (2019) studied transgender and gender diverse teens in New Orleans and found that they faced a "unique constellation of discrimination and compromised social services, putting them at risk for housing insecurity, homelessness, and its associated public health concerns." Unfortunately, there is no current research on housing insecurity

specifically experienced by Tongan leiti but going into this research project we (rightly) assumed that they would share some similar themes with housing insecure trans people in other contexts.

The concept of 'home' evokes complex and highly individualised ideas and includes the relationship between people and place. This is described by Dovey (1985, p42) as, "an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places." Somerville (1992, p532) suggests that home is "physically, psychologically and socially constructed. It is where we construct and manage our relationship with the physical and social worlds. It represents not only how we live but who we are." We need to be aware of these nuances as we discuss this topic, as housing insecurity constitutes more than a lack of shelter and can also impact on individuals' core sense of belonging and identity.

This was made evident throughout the project as participants and colleagues discussed the difference between *fale* and *api*. In this context *fale* can be reasonably compared to its English equivalent – house, a place of shelter, security, and protection from the elements. Conversely *api* is more similar to the English understanding of home and yet it is much deeper than that as it refers to a family allotment of land where their family home is built. Thus, *api* incorporates ideas of family, land, shelter, and belonging. This interconnects with the fonofale model of wellbeing and indicates that Tongan people would have a greater sense of wellbeing when they are connected to their *api*.

When discussing this concept with my TLA research partners we explored changing the project title to *Finding an Api* or something similar to incorporate these ideas. In the end we decided against it due to stylistic value of the alliteration and due to the 'action research' nature of this project which is working towards greater housing security from an international development perspective.

Conclusion

This first half of this chapter explored how western societies have constructed false narratives and romantic myths of sexuality and gender identity in the Pacific. The objectification of Pacific bodies continues today through tourism advertising, and other forms of stereotyping. It has shown that leiti identity is complex and dynamic, and thus avoids simplistic definitions. The chapters demonstrates the possible pitfalls of applying western mindsets or worldviews when trying to understand leiti lives and identities. This chapter has also shown the importance of the Tonga Leitis' Association in the lives of their members and the important work they undertake.

The second half of this chapter presented a holistic understanding of wellbeing in the Pacific. Through the fonofale model we can see that Pacific people view different aspects of their health, such as spiritual, physical, and mental wellbeing as being inextricable from each other and the contexts within which they live. Housing insecurity has been explored within this context and we have seen how

important both physical houses and the concept of home are to the wellbeing of individuals. We have also highlighted the unique housing challenges face by the LGBTIAQ+ community.

This chapter has demonstrated that there are gaps in the literature relating to leiti lives and the challenges they face. A significant gap relates to their relationship with housing which this research project explores for the first time.

Chapter Four- Methodology

> *"you say that you think*
> *therefore you are*
> *but thinking belongs*
> *in the depths of the earth*
> *we simply borrow*
> *what we need to know*
> *these islands the sky*
> *the surrounding sea*
> *the trees the birds*
> *and all that are free*
> *the misty rain*
> *the surging river*
> *pools by the blowholes*
> *a hidden flower*
> *have their own thinking*
> *they are different frames*
> *of mind that cannot fit*
> *in a small selfish world"*

Dr Konai Helu-Thaman, from her poem "Thinking" (1997).

Introduction

I begin this chapter with these words of Dr Konai Helu-Thaman because she is a brilliant Tongan academic and poet, and also because she illustrates my methodological motivation for this research project. She begins with a famous quote from René Descartes, a French philosopher who helped establish the foundations of rational western philosophy. She then distances herself from Descartes, and from western epistemology, by locating herself with the land, the sky, the sea, the birds, and the flowers. By doing so she sides with indigenous knowledges and epistemologies that understand humanity as an intimately interwoven and completely inseparable part of the natural world, rather than distinct from it.

In the introduction to this thesis, I explored the 'conscientisation' journey I have been on, towards a greater understanding of structural oppression. This included engaging with feminist thought, queer theory, decolonial discourse, and liberation theology. This chapter will draw on some of these theories amongst others to outline the theoretical basis of this research project and how I drew on the principles of PAR as the methodological approach. It will also show the limitations of these theories especially in relation to the context of research in the Pacific. It will explore PAR as a methodology and provide initial

reflections on how this guided the project. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an examination of my positionality and an outline of the reflexive process I took throughout this project.

Development of theory

Understanding 'minority' issues requires a personal sensitivity to the needs of the other, an ability to listen to the voices of those at the margins, and a deep understanding of history which relates to both structural oppression as well as the struggle for justice and equity. As an advocate within rainbow communities, I encountered these narratives and learnt a great deal from rainbow peers, while also recognising my own 'power and privilege' as someone who is white, cis-gender, male, and university educated.

The experience of working on community development projects in Aotearoa, showed me the immense value of approaches and theories which give power and 'voice' to those who are traditionally viewed as 'marginalised.' These theories inform both my personal praxis as well as this project.

Indigenous Knowledge

From the 1980s, the development community and development theorists became increasingly critical of international development as a solution to poverty. There was a growing number of examples of development projects that had caused more harm than good, and voices such as Chambers (1983) posited that these failures could be caused by a lack of input from the communities which the projects aimed to help.

Postcolonial theorists such as Spivak (1988), Hooks (1990), and Goss (1996) argued that Western thought was valued 'over' indigenous epistemologies and knowledges, and therefore local 'voices' were ignored to the detriment of the development projects. These theorists showed that both projects and development theory would hugely benefit from the knowledge, voices, and actions of local indigenous communities. They also contend that indigenous communities had survived and thrived long before colonisation and so often had their own solutions to issues of poverty which needed to be taken seriously by development workers.

Those of us from Aotearoa New Zealand live in a country which was formed by a treaty between two peoples: Te Tititi o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi. This document has a contested and fraught history, but now forms an important basis of our constitutional law and informs future legislative processes. It also guides Government departments on how they should conduct their work. An example of this is the Ministry of Health which states on its website that its Treaty commitments includes:

Tino rangatiratanga: The guarantee of tino rangatiratanga, which provides for Māori self-determination and mana motuhake in the design, delivery, and monitoring of health and disability services (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2020).

This shows that the New Zealand Government is committed to including both 'western' and 'indigenous' principles and knowledge into the development of law, policy, and public services. As a New Zealander I was raised within this context and it greatly informs my worldview. I write more about my commitment to Te Tiriti in the following chapter.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The work of Paulo Freire has had a significant influence on both the theory and practice of development. His seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) informed activists, educationalists, the development community, and many other professions who sought to improve the lives of others. Freire argued that people become more fully human by gaining greater freedom, education, and emancipation from oppression.

Freire saw oppression[8] as dehumanising to both the oppressor and the oppressed. He argued that the role of the oppressed is to struggle for liberation, and through this struggle they will liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor. To achieve this, the oppressed must first recognised that they are oppressed. This is a process he refers to as 'conscientisation' or becoming aware of your oppression. This can be accomplished through dialogue with peers who have already achieved this state of consciousness. This dialogue constitutes a "joint search for truth" and requires a "profound love for people and the world" (p70).

Freire warns that the oppressor cannot undertake this work but rather it must come from those who are oppressed. He says that his is a "pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed" (p29). He argues that to not include the participation of the oppressed, "is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building" (p47). This theory greatly influenced the development of the participatory approach.

The participatory approach

By the late 1990s, participatory approaches were beginning to be viewed as best-practice by the development community. Guijt and Shah (1997) explained that the broad aim of participatory

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[8] Oppression can be viewed here as both structures and individual actions which removes choice, freedom, and agency from others.

development is to "increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised peoples in decision-making over their own lives" (p1). This should put people at the centre and reverse power dynamics inherent in roles, relationships, and behaviours. Robert Chambers (1998, p103) said that when this is done well "outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen and learn."

As early as 1994 Chambers was warning that the language of participation could be easily co-opted by the development community to sugar coat their traditional development approach. He warns that this can be purely cosmetic, or more insidious as development actors use the language of participation to access low-cost local labour.

To avoid these pitfalls Chambers recommends practitioners:

1) Acknowledge and confront your middle-class bias.

This recognises that the easiest people to undertake participatory approaches with will be the 'elites' of that community. This excludes the poorest and least educated whose voices are equally important.

2) Ensure enough time is allowed.

A good participatory approach takes a lot of time, sometimes years to be most effective. It requires trust built through relationships. Often the time required is underestimated by practitioners.

3) Be wary of myth-making.

Chambers warned that sometimes participants will say what they think the researcher wants to hear. This is especially the case if there is an expectation of some aid or development project proceeding from the research.

4) Problem of routine.

As participatory approaches become more widespread, there is a risk that they become 'just another check-box exercise' or worse – something which is included in a project brief purely because there is an expectation from donors that it will be there.

5) Ensure that words align with actions.

While many practitioners are drawn to participatory approaches in theory, the reality of practicing it well is often convoluted, burdensome, and can create frustration. It is also predicated on power reversals and so requires researchers to give up some agency, which can be difficult in practice.

These warnings proved useful to my approach to this research and informed my approach. Unfortunately, I was not able to fully avoid these pitfalls as I have explored further in chapter five.

Cooke and Kothari (2001, p4) argue that some of these pitfalls are unavoidable as "the discourse itself, not just the practice, embodies the potential for an unjustified exercise of power." Their book explores the potential 'tyranny' of participation which fall into three main categories:

1) The decision-making and control (power) is generally retained by the 'outsider' researcher/ practitioner.
2) Tyranny of the majority means that marginalised community members could be further disempowered by 'collective' decision-making.
3) Tyranny of the method – are there more appropriate or more indigenous methods which might be missing from the process? (p8)

I assert that many of these potential tyrannies are best avoided by reflexively drawing on the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is explored further in this chapter.

Action Research

Kurt Lewin first coined the term Action Research in the 1940s when studying group dynamics. He supposed that social change could be best achieved through a process which simultaneously included research, training, and action. He envisioned this process as a spiral of planning, action, and fact-finding as a result of that action.

Lewin (1948) argued that the best way to understand something was to change it. Lewin used these theories to pioneer 'sensitivity training' to unfreeze prejudicial thinking and use group dynamics and lived experiences to move participants to a new understanding. These ideas inform the foundation of more modern approaches to Action Research which view social action and social research as intimately interconnected rather than discrete processes.

Principles from participatory approaches, action research, and other critical theories blended into Participatory Action Research (PAR) which attempts to combine the best aspects of these theories while avoiding the worst pitfalls.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

As a student of development, I am not just interested in understanding a group of people, but also being a part of changing their circumstances for the better. Currently most research on leiti in Tonga has been extractive and has done little to improve their situation. Participatory Action Research (PAR)

seeks to work *with* a community in order to produce research which is also useful to that community as it creates change (Kindon et al., 2007).

Wadsworth's 1998 article *What is Participatory Action Research?* is widely referenced as an early definition of PAR. In this short paper Wadsworth sets out the aspects of PAR which draw from participatory as well as action research traditions. She shows where these ideas synthesis well, and where there is creative friction. She shows that it is the responsibility of the PAR practitioner to 'straddle' these two worlds. She concludes that, at its most essential, PAR "involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action … in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it."

Williams (2007, p620) shows how PAR is a hybrid methodology with its roots in a range of theories. It has origins in Marxist theory as it focuses on causes of underdevelopment. It links to liberation theory as it seeks to understand and transform structural oppressions. It aligns with critical theory as "it views knowledge as historically and socially constructed and mediated through dominant groups in society." It therefore also overlaps with feminist theory which is concerned with oppressive structural power relations.

The PAR process can be inherently 'messy' and dynamic as it is centred on the relationship between the researcher and the participants. This organic approach to research is referred to by Herr and Anderson (2005) as 'designing the plane while flying it'. Best-practice PAR is based on deep research relationships, where power is shared more equally between the 'outsider' researcher and the 'insider' participants. The aim is to create 'co-researchers' or what Freire refers to as 'co-investigators'. These relationships require time and intentionality to build trust and negotiate shared understandings and work approaches. The genuine nature of these relationships helps the practitioner avoid all research tools and techniques which turn people into "objects of inquiry or scientific experimentation" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013, p9).

Tandon's (1988) work identified three key aspects of authentic participatory research:
- People having role and agency in setting the agenda
- People participating in the collection and analysis of data
- People having control over the use and outcomes of data and whole process

There is a sense of reciprocity in this relationship as the co-researchers work together to produce knowledge which informs action. The 'insiders' contribute lived experience, contextual understandings, and access to networks and resources. The 'outsiders' can contribute the weight of their academic

institute and scientific rigor to give legitimacy to this knowledge and are often backed with financial resources.

The action aspect of PAR is centred on its "explicit focus on changing a social practice or situation, not just understanding it" (Williams, 2007, p615). Ideally this occurs through an action/reflection process, but may also arise from a more linear approach of gathering information and using this to inform collective action.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, p591) explain that sometimes the process "sacrifices methodological sophistication in order to generate timely evidence that can be used and further developed in a real-life process of transformation." This requires a certain pragmatism in application of PAR which will be explored further in proceeding chapters.

Likewise, the PAR process may require practitioners to 'unlearn' some of their assumptions about what it is to do research. Fals-Borda (1995) is worth quoting at length on this subject as he gives impactful advice to academics from Western countries attempting to undertake PAR in developing countries:

- *Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. That is, fill in the distance between subject and object;*
- *Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them;*
- *Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organizations; and*
- *Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals.*

This advice has been crucial to my research process and is something I reflect on regularly. I also remember that the PAR is an action/reflection/adaption process which relies on trial and error. Some of this learning will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

Influence of Pacific Methodologies on this project

Kaupapa Māori

While PAR has been a primary methodological influence on this project, it has also been heavily influenced by an understanding of a Kaupapa Māori approach to research. This is important as PAR is

typically viewed as a 'western' methodology, whereas Kaupapa Māori is indigenous and situated in the context of the Pacific region.

Kaupapa Māori as a methodology was developed in Aotearoa in the 1980s and 90s following the Māori Renaissance and in parallel with growing Māori research related to the Waitangi Tribunal and settlement processes. It recognises Māori knowledge as distinct from Pākehā knowledge as it has metaphysical origins that inform how Māori think, understand themselves, and interpret information (Nepe, 1991).

Kaupapa Māori recognises these differences and sets out a process for undertaking research that honours the dignity (*mana*) of those involved and ensures that all participants benefit from the research. It that sense it is an emancipatory theory (similar to PAR) which aims to displace oppressive systems and work towards social change (Pipi et al., 2004).

Smith (1999) identified seven key Kaupapa Māori research practices which should inform researchers working with indigenous communities. I have summarised these as follows:

1) Aroha ki te Tangata

This is about having love and respect for all people involved in the research. It ensures that through positive relationships researchers will act ethically and allow everyone involved their own agency.

2) He Kanohi Kitea

Kanohi ki te kanohi means face-to-face and is crucial to involving Māori communities. This builds trust and relationship and means that the possibility of misunderstanding is reduced.

3) Titiro, Whakarongo… Kōrero

This provides a process for researchers that respects Māori participants: *titiro* means look, *whakarongo* means listen, and *kōrero* means talk. This suggests that researchers should spend most of their time observing and listening deeply in order to understand and only talking when they have gained understanding and know that it is appropriate to do so.

4) Manaaki ki te Tangata

To *manaaki* is to provide care and hospitality for the other. This concept is about relationship and collaboration. It seeks reciprocity in the research process and acknowledges the expertise of all involved.

5) Kia Tupato

This is about self-awareness, cultural safety, reflexive practice, and deep understanding of one's positionality including insider/outsider status.

6) Kaua e Takahia te Mana o te Tangata

A direct translation of this phrase is: Do not trample the *mana* of the people. *Mana* is a complex concept which can include English concepts such as authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, and charisma. *Mana* is a supernatural force embodied by a person, place, or object. An ethical researcher should not just avoid trampling on another's mana, but should also work to enhance their *mana*.

7) Kia Ngakau Māhaki

This concept is all about humility, not flaunting your own knowledge and not presuming a lack of knowledge in another. This concept respects all forms of knowledge and avoids privileging some knowledge over others.

These principles have informed the ethical approach of this research and compliment the PAR methodological principles. These concepts are complimentary to Tongan values and therefore fit well with research in a Tongan context.

Talonoa-considered

Consideration was given to the method and methodology of talanoa as an approach to this research. At its simplest, talanoa can be viewed as a conversation, exchange of ideas, discussion, or even debate. This could be formal or informal and usually conducted face-to-face (Vaioleti, 2006). It is a process which requires time, hospitality, and a generosity of spirit. Many major decisions in Pacific Island countries are arrived at through a form of talanoa.

Over time this has emerged as an ethical and effective way to conduct participatory research within Pacific communities. Due to the cultural nuances of talanoa, there is a widely held view within the academy and the Pacific community that it is inappropriate and indeed probably impossible for palangi researchers to undertake it. Instead, I ensured the research was informed by the principles of talanoa which align well with a PAR approach.

Positionality and reflexivity

There is an understanding in social research that a practitioner must gain a deep understanding of themselves and their own limitations before they can safely and effectively understand the 'other'. This is the basis of taking a reflexive approach to research which acknowledges one's starting position

(positionality) which includes all aspects of who you are, what biases you bring, and how this might impact on your research. According to Peake and Trotz (1999) this process will help the researcher build mutual respect and recognition and can help ensure the safety of all involved.

Positionality can include understanding your position within economic, political, and sociological spheres. Positionality can also include other identity traits such as race, marriage status, nationality, sexuality, gender identity and the like (Chase, 2019). These identities and traits will impact on how you view yourself and how others will view you throughout the impact. This in turn will impact on your interactions with other. It is important to constantly and consistently 'check-in' and reflect on your positionality with others as this may change throughout the project.

PAR has been described by Chevalier (2013, p4) as a "tradition of active-risk taking and experimentation in social reflectivity backed up by evidential reasoning and learning through experience and real action." This indicates that reflexivity is not just important for individual researchers involved in PAR but also important for all involved in the research project as it moves through the action/reflection/adaption cycle.

Personal reflections on my positionality

I am a Pākehā[9], cisgender, male: three identities which represent the 'holy grail' of privilege. These markers of privilege combine with others, including growing up in a loving, middle-class home, attending good schools, and growing up free from drugs and violence. I am incredibly lucky and indeed incredibly privileged, but I have not always known it.

My journey towards understanding began at around 12 years old when I discovered that I was sexually attracted to people with the same gender as myself. This was something that confused and scared me. I grew up in a rural, southern part of Aotearoa New Zealand which was very conservative. It is an area where boys were expected to grow up into manly men, play rugby, drink beer, and 'chase' women. Anyone who yearned for something outside of this was described as poofters, queers, faggots, and worse. To find myself in this camp (pun intended) was terrifying, and something that I supressed and ignored for many years. When I finally did 'come out' I began to question why this was necessary. What was it about gay people that offended so many straight people? What kind of differences were embraced by society and which were despised? What led to these reactions and how could this be changed?

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[9] A word in the Māori language which describes people who are not indigenous to Aotearoa, New Zealand.

My journey towards answering these questions was both complicated and complimented by my religious faith. I grew up in a Presbyterian, Christian household; a denomination which was not very inclusive of LGBTIAQ+ folk. Knowing this made it particularly difficult for me to come out to my parents. The dissonance between my faith and my sexuality, led me to study both theology and politics. This allowed me to explore many of these questions in depth and even find some working answers.

It was through these studies, and the people I met there, that I discovered feminist theory, queer theory, and other structural understandings of power and oppression. I learned more about my own identity and my place in the world. My values and beliefs were challenged and deepened, especially my commitment to working towards social justice and equity.

Following completion of my undergraduate degree I went on to work in community development and youth development, particularly with a focus on supporting rainbow communities. I continue to advocate for greater rainbow inclusion in the church. Through travel my worldview was broadened, and I began to see myself more as a global citizen than just a New Zealander. This has created a tension where I want to focus on supporting vulnerable communities both here in Aotearoa and overseas.

This tension has led me to volunteer for anti-poverty organisations and Fairtrade movements, and I eventually spent a year working for World Vision. Through these journeys I experienced some examples of best-practice international development, and I also witnessed situations and projects which seemed harmful if not directly exploitative of communities which were purportedly being 'helped'. It was this uneasiness about the international development industry that led to wanting to study it in more depth and thus undertaking this master's degree part-time.

Finding PAR principles in international development was a relief as it seemed like an approach which aligned well with my values and experiences. PAR approaches demand that practitioners ask tough questions about themselves, questions I have continued to ask throughout this project.

Outsider and/or insider?

To further understand my positionality within this research, I needed to understand my place as an insider and/or outsider. An 'insider' within a development context is usually someone who lives within, or has lived experience of being part, of the community (physical, social, ethnic etc) of interest. Whereas an 'outsider' is someone who does not have this lived experience and so is coming into that community from another space or place.

Herr (2005) suggests that most participants within a PAR process do not fall neatly into these discrete categories and she instead proposes that these ideas fit on a continuum. This model recognises the

complexity of human identity and how one person may have overlapping and fluid identities. Herr's model includes six steps from insider to outsider:

1) Insider research, where researcher studies own self/practice

This includes traditions including practitioner research, autobiography, narrative research and self-study.

2) Insider in collaboration with other insiders

This includes traditions such as feminist groups, inquiry groups, and team research

3) Insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s)

This includes traditions such as inquiry or study groups and unique forms of collaborative research

4) Reciprocal collaboration of insider-outsider teams

This includes traditions such as PAR which seeks equitable power relations

5) Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)

This includes change agents such as consultancies, organisational learning as well as radical change through community empowerment (Freirean)

6) Outsider(s) studies insider(s)

This is the model of traditional, university/academic research approaches.

It is important to note that this model is also a simplification and does not account for the fluid nature of positionality. Researchers may move between different levels of 'insiderness' or 'outsiderness' as they move between neighbourhoods, as the language used in interviews changes, or at different stages of the PAR process.

PAR principles can be useful in research across this continuum but is most suited to projects within steps three and four. As I reflected on my own positionality and the limitations of times and resources I faced with this research. I needed to be honest about where this project sat on the continuum.

As a palangi I was always going to be an outsider within the Tongan leiti community. This is despite my close affinity to leiti as we share a 'rainbow' identity and Aotearoa New Zealand being a Pacific Island of sorts. As a friend of Poli (the Chair of the Tonga Leitis' Association) and working in collaboration with the TLA, I had access to the 'inside' but would never be an insider. This was compounded by my inability to speak the Tongan language.

Johnson (1984) agrees with this complexity, noting that during 'fieldwork' the researcher is in a liminal space, separated from their own culture, but not yet incorporated into the host culture. This is a compromised position where the researcher is both participating in the culture and observing the culture. The researcher must consider the 'self' in relation to others and their positioning in the culture being studied.

While I had hoped that this project could reach the criteria of step four of this continuum, in reality it was step five. As outsider I initiated the project and have worked collaboratively (but not equitably) with insiders on the execution.

My reflexive practice

During my time as a youth development practitioner, reflexive practice was built into my day-to-day work. Youth development is predicated on maintaining the safety of vulnerable young people and as such action/reflection/adaption is a key component of ethical practice. This is carried out through case-noting, external and internal supervision, and professional development.

My approach to this research project has included similar components. I have kept a journal which has included personal insights, observations, details of activities, and initial processing of interview data. This has been a space where I have reflected on my work as research practitioner and examined the effectiveness and ethical nature of my process regularly.

I also took the opportunity to 'check-in' with my research collaborators to ensure my research approach was appropriate and safe. I also had conversations about culture and language to further enhance the ethical nature and accuracy of the research. This was similar to the reflective nature of supervision and allowed me to gain insights into how I might be viewed by participants.

Finally, the whole process was a professional development opportunity as I gained new skills in working with local bureaucracy, I attended some local NGO-led workshops on disaster preparedness in the Tongan context, I attended local church and cultural events, and I read literature and background materials provided by the TLA.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how this research project has been informed by a range of theories and methodological approaches. What unites these ways of thinking and practicing, is a commitment to honouring the whole person of people who are marginalised by society. I have selected PAR principles as the most appropriate methodology for this project because it is best able to put the leiti at the centre, where they exercise agency and control, will be safe, and will reap the most benefit from the project.

This chapter has also demonstrated the importance of understanding one's positionality at all times within a research project and also the usefulness of reflexivity to a PAR process. I reflected on my own positionality that I took into the research and explored where I sat on an outsider/insider continuum.

The next chapter will explore in more detail the research process and outline how the project unfolded. It will continue to reflect on how well (or otherwise) I applied the principles of PAR.

Chapter Five- Research process

"To engage in activism that envisions alternatives ways of organizing society and alternative ways of being is to risk membership in society, a sense of belonging, however partial it may be. Activism can make us vulnerable because it is so obviously about wanting something beyond what is, and to have a political desire often is construed as wanting too much."

— Deborah B. Gould (2009)

Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis, I outlined how this project is built upon the friendship between Poli, Chair of the Tonga Leitis' Association (TLA), and myself. I could not imagine a PAR project involving an 'outsider' researcher proceeding effectively without a basis in genuine relationship.

I first spoke with Poli about the possibility of doing a shared research project in September 2018. We spoke via video call and he told me about previous researchers that had contacted the TLA. He expressed his disappointment about the way they had come to Tonga, undertaken their research, and then left again with very little follow-up. After explaining my understanding of PAR principles, he was greatly encouraged by the mutuality of this approach and said that he would talk with the TLA Executive Committee to see what might be possible.

Over the next twelve months the online discussions continued, and the foundation of a research project came together. As noted in preceding chapters, the topic of this research project was guided by the needs of the TLA. By September 2019 I was in Tonga interviewing leiti about their experience of housing insecurity. We conducted ten interviews in Vava'u and ten in Tongatapu.

This chapter will outline the process through which this research occurred and through which I navigated. It will continue to take a subjective, personal tone recognising that research does not occur in isolation but is done by-people-with-people, and somehow incorporates all the complexity and dynamism inherent in human endeavours.

Financial assistance

I applied for and was fortunate to receive a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Field Research Award. This funding allowed me to travel to Tonga and live comfortably and safely while working on the project. Without this funding it is likely I would have reconsidered the scope of the project or possibly even chosen a topic based in Aotearoa. This scholarship came with few conditions other than accounting for how the funds were spent and reporting on the outcomes. It in no way limited or influenced the way I conducted the research, although it did provide me with an opportunity to connect with the New Zealand Embassy in Tonga which subsequently hosted an NGO event where I was able to

present my initial findings. I will provide further detail about this event in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Human Ethics Committee application process

PAR is a methodology that is designed to not only do no harm to those it involved, but also seeks to do some good. It is therefore an inherently ethical approach to undertaking social research. University-based Human Ethics Committees tend to be more traditional and conservative to their ethics-approval processes. Their processes have been created to ensure that positivist research is conducted in an ethical way.

Kindon (2007) suggested that "engaging in PAR from within the academy can be hard because inflexible ethics review board structures cannot easily accommodate PAR's fluid and evolving nature." I encountered this when applying for ethics approval for this project as the committee required me to already have produced the following:

- Aims and objectives of the project
- Benefits and scholarly value
- Identification of key risk and potential ethical issues
- Sampling methods and rationale
- Copy of recruitment material
- Formal informed consent processes
- Processes for maintaining confidentiality and privacy or participants and safe data storage procedures.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach reverses the traditional research trajectory. Traditional development research is driven by the researcher's research interests and they devise the purpose of the research, research questions, and objectives in isolation to the people they wish to study (Philips & Burbules, 2000). Providing the information listed above to a Human Ethics Committee makes sense in this context. However, PAR research is only possible through deep relationship between the researcher and co-researchers (community of interest) who co-create the research components together (Gustafson & Brunger, 2014). This is a more ethical approach as it reduces the power imbalance between researcher and researched, yet it complicates traditional ethics application processes.

Protecting 'vulnerable' population groups from potential harm within health research can be traced back to the 1947 Nuremberg Code (Weindling, 2001). This was a response to the horrific experimentation carried out by Nazi scientists on nonconsenting subjects in concentration camps. The

concept of 'vulnerable subjects' was explicitly developed by the United States National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research who prepared the 1979 *Belmont Report.* Examples included "racial minorities, the economically disadvantaged, the very sick and the institutionalised" (part c, para 23). The report goes on to argue that they should be offered special protection against the danger "of being involved in research solely for administrative convenience, or because they are easy to manipulate."

The discourse around vulnerability has continued to evolve especially with the increasing emphasis on strength-based approaches which aim to empower people by building upon their strengths rather than focussing on their weaknesses. This approach avoids unnecessarily categorising or labelling people with deficit-based labels and thereby undervaluing their own agency. Butler (2009) warns us that labelling people as vulnerable can erase the reality that their vulnerability is 'politically induced.' Despite this emerging discourse, Human Ethics Committees rightly take a position of protecting people from harm and have an explicit interest in identifying people who may be more vulnerable to harm.

Leiti were identified as a vulnerable population for the purpose of this ethics application as they are a sexual and/or gender minority, sex between biological males is illegal in Tonga, and Tonga also still maintains anti-crossdressing laws. Anecdotal evidence had also indicated that leiti were more vulnerable to domestic violence, unfair eviction, and unemployment due to their sociocultural position. I addressed this vulnerability by putting in-place safety mechanisms which are outlined in greater detail below.

My approach in the ethics approval application was to explain what PAR was and how that prevented me from being able to provide detailed answers to some of their questions. I showed how PAR was inherently an ethical approach, and how co-creating the aspects of the research, together with the TLA while I was in Tonga, would be more ethical. I was fortunate to work with a committee member who was sympathetic to this approach and after some minor revisions and clarifications I was granted ethics approval on 9 September 2019.

My commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi

This research did not involve Māori participants, and did not take place in Aotearoa, and so the Treaty of Waitangi is not directly applicable to this project. However, as a community development practitioner I am committed to Te Tiriti as the founding document of our nation, and as the foundation of my professional practice. As tangata tiriti (the people of the Treaty/Pākehā) I am committed to a lifelong journey of learning more about te ao Māori (the Māori world view) and how to be a better Treaty partner.

The Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) Treaty of Waitangi Statute (VUW, 2019) sets out key principles of the Treaty as recognised by New Zealand law. These principles are useful for any researcher to consider, especially if that researcher is working with indigenous or vulnerable communities. The following section outlines the principles of the VUW Treaty Statute and my response to them:

> *The principle of Rangatiratanga recognises Māori autonomy and self-determination, as guaranteed in Article Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In the context of the University, it means encouraging senior Māori leadership roles and entities, spaces and events where tikanga Māori prevails, and engagement with and rights over te reo and mātauranga Māori.*

The principle of Rangatiratanga (autonomy and self-determination) is central to a PAR approach to research. PAR is committed to honouring the dignity and personhood of the researched and valuing their knowledge and life experience. This is why PAR is committed to a co-research model, where the researcher and the community collaboratively prepare research aims, questions and hypothesises.

> *The principle of Options (Kōwhiringa) acknowledges Māori rights to pursue their own personal direction, whether that be in accordance with tikanga Māori or not. In the context of the University, this means that Māori staff and students have a choice about whether or not to access Māori specific processes, services or support within the University environment.'*

The principle of Kōwhiringa (Options) also neatly fits a PAR model as the researcher takes a facilitative role in the research. This means that the community of co-researchers are able to explore more options and approaches to the research and decide which is the best fit for them. This was made evident as the TLA initiated the topic for this research project and have exercised agency throughout the research process.

> *The principle of Partnership (Mahi tahi) requires Māori and the Crown to work together for mutually beneficial outcomes. In the context of the University, this Principle underpins the integrity of the relationships formed between the University and its Māori stakeholders.*

A core principle of PAR research is genuine partnership between the researcher and the co-researchers. This is built upon genuine relationships and a commitment to the project and a positive outcome for the community. PAR seeks to replace "an 'extractive', imperial model of social research with one in which the benefits of research accrue more directly to the communities involved" (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007, p1).

> *The principle of Kaitiakitanga (Protection) ensures Māori rights and interests are actively protected through honourable conduct, fair processes, robust consultation and good decision*

making. In the context of the University, this means actively protecting Māori student, staff and stakeholder rights and interests in relation to University activities.

PAR is an inherently ethical approach to research, as it prioritises the needs of the community ahead of that of the lead researcher. The co-researchers are not merely informants, rather they are equal partners in the research process. These co-researchers should drive the research at every stage, as they have specialist knowledge of their community. This should result in improvement of research design, greater credibility of the data collected, greater dignity and protection for the participants, and more ownership of the resulting initiative (Gustafson & Brunger, 2014).

This section was included in the ethics application and I have included it here to illustrate how PAR principles can be applied in different contexts, and also to give greater context about the ethical underpinnings of this project. There are however other principles from te ao Māori (the Māori world view) that helped inform my research across cultures, as discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.

Initial time in Tonga

As a part-time masters student and full-time civil servant, I was working under tight timelines and I therefore finalised my travel plans after receiving only provisional ethics approval. This allowed me to fly to Tonga the day after receiving formal ethics approval, arriving 10 September 2019.

My initial online research had led me to the mistaken belief that I would not need a research permit to carry out research in Tonga. As well as scouring official websites, I had sent emails to the New Zealand embassy in Tonga, as well as the Tongan embassy in New Zealand enquiring about this, and neither returned my email. Fortunately, my co-researchers in the TLA who I met on arrival pointed me in the right direction and I made an appointment with their recommended contact at the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The following day I met with Lileka (a manager at the PMO) to discuss the project and learn about the process. I then went straight from her office to a local café to prepare the required documentation which I returned the same day.

Unfortunately, my hopes for a quick research permit approval process were thwarted as the following day it was announced that Prime Minister 'Akilisi Pōhiva, had passed away. Pōhiva was credited with helping to bring democracy to Tonga and was greatly respected across Tongan society. The country entered a mourning period, with many parts of the government shut-down, buildings draped in black and purple cloth, and a full state-funeral organised, the likes of which are usually reserved for members of the royal family.

This is an example of the unpredictable nature of 'fieldwork' in development research and was not something I could have made allowances for. This impinged on my already tight timeline as I only had five weeks in Tonga. After many follow-ups with the Prime Minister's Office, I finally received a formal Tongan Government Research Permit[10] nearly twenty days after first applying.

Because of the fluid and dynamic nature of PAR I was unsure what I could do during this period. I thought that I should be able to continue meeting with my colleagues at the TLA, make plans together and prepare the groundwork for the more formal aspects of the research. But as time wore on, I became increasingly anxious about how many interviews we would be able to conduct in the dwindling time I had left. We made the decision to begin recruitment so that at least we would have the contact information of people interested in having an interview once the permit came through.

On the 23rd of September 2019 I wrote in my journal "concern (personal) is building that things are moving too slowly." I wrote this because our plans for how we would conduct the research had not developed and I was finding it very difficult to coordinate with the very busy TLA executive committee. However, my next entry begins, "what a difference a day makes!" On the 24th I received confirmation from the exec that they were happy with my proposed approach and that I would be meeting that night with the exec members who were in the country as two were overseas.

At that meeting we discussed all aspects of the research approach, agreed that one-to-one interviews rather than focus groups were the best approach. We booked the first interview on Tongatapu and also finalised a plan to conduct interviews on Vava'u island to the north. They also suggested adding another question to the questionnaire to receive feedback about the work of the TLA. I learned a lesson in patience from this experience, as well as the need to move at the speed of my local collaborative research partners.

Our research process

The TLA has a long and strong history of working with international NGO partners and have previously supported academics with their research. Some of their executive members also have a University education and so are familiar with Western academic approaches. This allowed for smooth discussion and negotiation of the method and approach of the research.

Topic

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[10] Copy attached at appendix 4.

The TLA had observed that there was sustained need for emergency/temporary accommodation for leiti who were experiencing housing insecurity. As such they wanted to conduct research which explored the causes of this housing insecurity and what could be done about it. As they were providing temporary accommodation for some leiti at the TLA national office in Nuku'alofa, they had observed that there was more need than they could accommodate. As such the research was focussed on an outcome of formulating practical solutions to this problem which would address both the presenting problem as well as the underlying, systemic causes.

Hypothesis

Our working hypothesis was that there are a number of sociocultural forces that lead to housing insecurity for leiti. These include social marginalisation due to ingrained gender-norms, religious values, and other cultural expectations. Initial conversations indicate that some families can experience shame when a leiti family member expresses their gender identity and they are often forced to leave the family home. It may also be more difficult for leiti to find paid work and so they might struggle to be able to afford private accommodation.

Data collection and sampling

We would test our hypothesis by collecting data through one-to-one interviews with leiti. We hoped to recruit between 10 and 20 participants across Tongatapu and Vava'u. The TLA supported the recruitment through word of mouth and social media. Due to the PAR nature of this research, the data collection was driven by the purpose of the research and could only occur within the context of the relationship with the Tonga Leitis' Association. This meant we would undertake purposive sampling, "a nonprobability sampling procedure in which elements are selected from the target population on the basis of their fit with the purposes of the study and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria" (Daniel, 2012, p82). More specifically the research utilised homogenous purposive sampling as we specifically recruited participants who are Tongan, identify as leiti, and lived in either Tongatapu or Vava'u.

During the ethics process I had prepared draft questionnaires for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.[11] My TLA collaborative partners and I reviewed these documents and slightly modified them where needed. They offered to support me with interviews where language was a barrier, but were happy for me to ask the questions. We agreed that the interview style will be semi-

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[11] Example of template attached at appendix 2 and 3.

structured using both the set questions from the questionnaire, as well as follow-up questions to exploring areas in more depth.

Action

While a typical PAR research project is focused on an ongoing action/reflection/adaption process, our project took a different trajectory. We were constrained by time, resources, and the functional nature of the project. The TLA wanted to conduct research with the purpose of providing data to support their emergency housing programme. This meant that the trajectory of our project became data-gathering/reflection/action. This chapter will show that this is an over-simplistic representation of the project as the interview process became an action in itself as participants felt empowered and deeply 'heard'. For some of them it was the first times they felt able to 'tell their story' and reflected that it was a cathartic experience.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants occurred through word-of-mouth, a post in the TLA closed Facebook group, and through fliers being handing out to potential interviewees. Some snowballing occurred as some participants told their friends who then got in touch offering to be interviewed.

Participant interviews

Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations including the TLA offices, cafés, members' homes, and public spaces. Interviewees were given a choice to select an interview environment that felt comfortable and safe to them. Safety concerns were taken into account, with TLA members being present at most interviews and informal risk assessments occurring before each. Interviews were conducted in English which is a national language in Tonga and is taught at all schools. Where interviewees struggled with expressing themselves in English, informal translation was offered by TLA members.

Consent and privacy

Informed consent was required before any interview took place. This involved participants signing a consent form which I talked through with them. Participants were informed that they would forgo no financial or personal benefit should they chose not to participate or withdraw from participation. Every attempt was made to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. This included anonymising the data and assigning each participant with a number so their names were de-linked from their interview. Due to the small population size of Tonga and even smaller size of the leiti community, complete anonymity could not be fully assured and so participants were informed of this risk. Participants were offered

support (pastoral care) following participation by the TLA. The researcher is not aware of any participants receiving this offer of follow-up support.

Data handling

Before the interviews began, participants were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire form. Some of the English used in this form was a little formal/ technical and so either a TLA member or myself talked the participants through the form where help was required. The answers to some of these questions helped inform the questions asked during the semi-structured oral interviews. Interviews were recorded on a dictaphone and some informal notes were taken by the researcher during each interview. These notes and the audio recordings are stored securely by the researcher and only accessed by the researcher. They will be destroyed 12 months after the completion of the project. The consent form included a tick box which enabled interviewees to request a copy of their interview audio.

First participant interview

On 25 September 2019 I conducted my first participant interview. My journal notes that it was a 'good first interview' as the participant was long-standing member of the TLA, had good English and was confident in telling her story as she had done so many times previously including as a part of the *Leitis in Waiting* documentary. I did note that her story 'was pretty full on' which meant that I was emotionally impacted by hearing it.

I do not recall being nervous about these interviews and did not note any nervousness in my journal. I do recall having concerns about the process, and not being sure what to expect in terms of my ability to communicate across cultures and build trust. This lack of nervousness is likely due to my experience with international travel, and my experience working cross-culturally in community/youth development work. Youth development in particular gave me specific skills such as motivational interviewing and pastoral conversations which I applied in these interviews. I do recall relaxing more as I carried out subsequent interviews and this allowed me to go further 'off script' and take greater advantage of the semi-structured interview method.

Vava'u

On 26 September 2019 I flew to Vava'u Island. This was made possible as Poli was delivering a workshop there for Red Cross and so was able to connect me with the Vava'u branch of the TLA. This branch was led by Lavenda who I noted in my journal was "an incredible host and has organised everything."[12] The

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[12] Personal research journal entry dated 26 September 2019.

first order of business was sight-seeing (the island is very picturesque) and then Lavenda took me to a family wedding. I noted in my journal feelings of awkwardness at turning up to a wedding unannounced, but I was made to feel welcome and enjoyed the 'cultural experience.'

This summed up a lot of my time in Tonga, I naively stumbled my way through a range of interactions, trusting in the guidance of my TLA partners, having faith that all these interactions would give me greater insights into Tongan culture and the lives of leiti. While I was only on Vava'u Island for four nights, in that time I conducted 10 interviews, attended a Red Cross workshop, attended a wedding, went sightseeing, swam, climbed a 'mountain', attended bars and house parties, and ate-out at various restaurants. Fortunately, all of these experiences proved valuable and did provide insights which supported the project.

At the end of my time in Vava'u I made a ten-minute personal dictaphone recording reflecting on my time there. I noted that it had been a 'full on' few days on the island which did not give me much space to reflect on what I was observing. I noted my gratitude to Lavenda for her hosting and all that she made possible through her connections with leiti there. She was key to the success of this time.

I also reflected on the amount of 'drama' that I observed leiti involved with. I thought that there might be something about leiti identity which encourages a kind of 'feistiness' and 'passion' which can sometimes lead to interpersonal conflict. This created challenges for me as a researcher to find balance between how 'involved' I was in these conflicts as I navigated my role and approach.

I also found that through the interviews I was observing a trend that life seemed to be better for leiti in Vava'u than on Tongatapu. I hypothesised that this might be due to the larger numbers of international tourists there which created a more liberal and open environment. This seemed to be especially the case for younger leiti.

Finally, I reflected on how I was being impacted by hearing about some of the severe levels of violence that some leiti had experienced. I identified a pervasive idea that someone can 'beat the leiti out of a boy' and make them more masculine, which is unfortunately a common experience for leiti. This violence ironically had the opposite effect to that intended and made leiti fearful of men and more likely to associate predominantly with women.

I was told by one participant (following an interview) that her brother had been beaten, 'almost to death'. She said that when their father found out that he was attracted to men, he took wire and tried to strangle him to death. Fortunately, her brother managed to escape and now lives with extended family in Australia and identifies as a gay man.

This shows how dangerous like can be for leiti and the possible impacts of the negative societal views towards leiti. It also highlighted the importance of informal conversations following formal interviews, and how these sometimes occur in social setting where participants are more comfortable.

Tongatapu

After saying my farewells in Vava'u, I returned to Tongatapu. I regretted not spending more time in Vava'u as it was a productive and engaging experience. My remaining time in Tonga continued to be a mixture of preparing for interviews, carrying out the interviews, and recruiting more participants. By now I was very comfortable with conducting the interviews and found that they went longer as we strayed through a range of different topics. I continued to find that sometimes participants told me more details and stories after the formal interview had finished.

My remaining time was also very social. I had now made friends and connections and was attending a number of events as varied as muscle-building competitions and embassy-sponsored film screenings. I continued with a little sightseeing and even showed some fellow tourists beautiful spots I had been shown earlier.

Following my interview with participant number 15 (a trans man/ fakatangata[13]) I made a dictaphone recording as a form of reflection. I was moved by this interview as they were the first trans man I met in Tonga and I was impressed with his resilience. He seemed to face even greater discrimination than leiti as there was less cultural understanding and acceptance of his identity. I was also struck by how thankful he was to share his story with me. Because Tonga is a small place which is highly interconnected, he said he could not trust talking to anyone about his identity in Tonga for fear of being 'outed'. It was only my 'outsider' identity which allowed him to connect and share, which seemed to be a cathartic and encouraging experience for him.

Ethical reflections

It is not uncommon to experience ethical dilemmas during these kinds of dynamic research processes. Chambers (2008, p230) recognises that as PAR theory and practice are not always neat and straightforward, a researcher should "use your own best judgement at all times." This necessity to 'think on your feet' and constantly balance what is ethical with what will produce good research outcomes

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[13] Fakatangata is an identity which is analogous with a trans man, someone who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man. There may be culturally specific aspects of this identity which warrant further research.

within the limitations of the project, is inherent to PAR, which seeks not just to do no harm, but indeed hopes to do some good.

Re-reading my journal, one year on from the 'fieldwork' I am struck by just how much of an outsider I was. The first week or so reads almost like a diary of someone on a tropical holiday. This was due to the country shutting down to mourn the loss of the Prime Minister. This left me with little to do but settle in, explore, and meet people.

Other aspects of the journals show how quickly I 'gained access' to insider spaces. This included attending Miss Galaxy events, private houses, and clubs which leiti frequent. I also had informal conversations and gained insights into wider views on leiti from encounters with local people at shops and other public spaces. People were interested and friendly and fairly open in sharing their thoughts and observations.

The main ethical dilemma I faced was as a single, openly gay, palangi man, I drew some unwanted attention. This brought with it some advantages as it seemed to encourage recruitment of interviewees, but it also led to awkward situations and encounters, which when combined with alcohol, resulted in physical conflict.

This conflict arose from a personal relationship I made with a gay Tongan man called 'H'. We met in the first week I was there, and our friendship became a significant part of my five weeks stay in Tonga. H worked at a hotel in Nukualofa and was friendly, knowledgeable, and well-liked. We spent a lot of time together, going to the beach, going out for meals, and attending events. He did not identify with the 'leiti' label and was not a member of the TLA. He never got involved directly in the research, but did offer informal insights which benefitted the project.

Conflict arose one evening when we were dancing in a club together. This made some leiti 'jealous' and some 'drama' ensued. Eventually this spilled out into the parking lot where a physical altercation occurred between two groups.[14] Although I stayed out of it, it was still a startling experience. I reflected on this situation with Poli and other members of the TLA exec. They assured me that this kind of behaviour was unfortunately common for some leiti, who get jealous easily, and were often involved in 'drama'. They assured me that this situation would not negatively impact the research project.

This situation illustrates the ethical and safety risks involved in doing research which involves close relationships and working in communities with different social mores. While the project was not

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[14] Personal research journal entry dated 20-09-2019.

disrupted by this incident, there was a risk it could have been. Reflecting on this experience I would in the future establish stronger boundaries and be more careful about how my friendships could impact on the project.

Chase's (2019) work on the ethics of working with migrant young people encourages researchers to ask themselves deep questions about their approach to relational research approaches. Chase says that as we embrace more flexible and reciprocal research approaches, we need to be mindful of where we draw the line as these are areas "which we rarely discuss or dare to consider" (p469). Chase notes that ethical boundaries are difficult to negotiate when we move fluidly between roles from "researcher to guest, friend or lonely foreigner" (p460). This is where reflexive processes referred to earlier including journaling, checking-in with co-collaborators, and professional development, are so important to maintaining the safety of participants and researchers alike.

Further reflections on the research process

As noted, I have tried to be reflexive throughout my time in Tonga and indeed throughout this project. In concluding my thoughts on my time in Tonga, I want to reflect critically on what went well and what could be improved. This will be a short overview as some aspects of the project will be further critically analysed in subsequent chapters.

Research strengths

Firstly, I am proud that I was able to gather stories from 20 participants over the course of my five weeks in Tonga. This was despite setbacks including the amount of time it took to gain a research permit. This was only possible due to the strength of relationships I had with the TLA and their generosity in supporting this project.

I also believe that these interviews were carried out well and produced useful insights. I seemed to be able to strike a balanced approach that was more friendly than formal and therefore gained the trust of the participants. The interviews seemed to be a positive experience for the participants with some telling me this afterwards and other positive feedback being received by the TLA. I took seriously the PAR principle of not just trying to do no harm, but also trying to do a little good throughout the research process. This meant that I was encouraging and empathetic throughout the interviews and this was positively received. It also gave participants an opportunity to reflect on experiences or feelings they had not thought about previously.

I believe that seeing me at bars, restaurants, and social events made me more approachable to leiti who saw me as more 'real' and 'down to earth' than their stereotypes of a palangi academic. I believe

this both helped with recruitment as well as the quality of the interviews. This focus on being active and involved in all aspects of the community also gained me incredibly useful informal observations which helped guide the project and allowed me to adapt and be more relevant.

My relationship with the TLA aimed to strike a balance between collaborative working and not wanting to be a burden on already very busy people whose TLA roles were usually voluntary and 'on-top' of already full and varied lives.

As previously mentioned, I was invited by the New Zealand Embassy in Tonga to present my initial findings to a groups of embassy staff, NGO workers, and local leaders. I spent much of my last week in Tonga doing an initial informal analysis of the interviews in order to generate quotes and insights from the research. This proved valuable as I was able to process my experience and the data while the interviews and my time in Tonga was still fresh in my mind.

Research limitations

While I am guided and inspired by the PAR approach, due to the limitations of time and resources inherent within a Masters level project, I quickly found that I was not able to conduct PAR research in the way that I had hoped. At its best, PAR is a learning journey between the co-researchers. It is expected that they will frame the project, conduct an action/reflection/adaptation research process together, and analyse and report the results as a team. In our case I primarily drove the project, conducted the interviews, analysed the data, and reported the results, with only guidance and input from my TLA collaborative partners. I believe that PAR principles informed this project and ensured it was both successful and ethical, but ultimately it does not meet the basic requirements of a PAR project.

Overall, I believe that being physically present in a range of social settings such as events, celebrations, and informal settings such as cafes and bars around Tonga, benefitted the project as it made me accessible and 'real' to the participants. It may have also had some negative side-effects such as the events illustrated in the previous section. By establishing friendships with some people in the small community, I unintentionally may have been seen as 'taking-sides' in historic inter-personal conflicts. This may have led to the confrontation which I referred to in a previous section. This may have been unforeseeable and unavoidable, but did make me reflect deeply on how I balanced my personal interaction as well as the social and formal aspects of the research project.

Data processing and analysis

As I undertook the interviews, as I engaged in informal conversations at events, and as I discussed leiti experiences with my TLA colleagues, I began to see connections and trends. I could not help but begin

analysing the data as I received it. Kovach (2009) notes that it is normal for data analysis to commence at the earliest moments of data collection. Humble (2020) goes further and contends that simply distinguishing an event as data, represents a form of analysis. This process was fast-tracked by the need to undertake an initial informal analysis of the data to present my initial findings at the event organised by the New Zealand Embassy.

From the outset of this project, I felt a weight of responsibility to ensure that I treated the participants' stories with dignity and honour. I wanted to ensure that their voices were given an appropriate platform so that they might make a difference. There is an inherent issue acknowledged by Skelton (2001) in striking a balance between representation and appropriation when analysing and presenting participants material. This is a balance which PAR should be able to overcome, as your co-researchers navigate this with you.

As I returned to Aotearoa New Zealand after the interviews were conducted and had no resources or time to return to Tonga, this co-analysis has been unable to occur. My collaborative partners have received and given feedback on a draft research report which included key sections of this thesis, but this is not the level of co-creation I hoped to achieve.

Elliot (2018) highlights the tension within social research of whether or not "every recorded fieldwork detail is worthy of consideration, or if "only the most salient portions merit examination." As this research project is focussed primarily on causes of and solutions to housing insecurity for leiti, this was the focus of analysis and processing of the data.

I made a conscious decision not to write out full transcripts of my interviews. This would have felt like an alien process, to literally take them out of the mouths of my interviewees and artificially set them down on paper. This would sanitise them and would fail to recognise the disparity between oral and written communication (Kowal, 2014). This project needed all the data of the audio recordings. The hesitancies, the inflections, the pregnant pauses, the sighs, and the chuckles. My analysis therefore took a similar form to the interviews. It was all about listening, listening in order to understand.

Chilisa (2012) reminds us that knowledge is inherently relational, it occurs as people experience and encounter the other, as well as the world around them. This sets the foundation of what Thayer-Bacon (2003) refers to as relational epistemology, a way of knowing based on relationship among a community of knowers or knowledge holders. This relational form of generating knowledge aligns comfortably with PAR principles.

Wilson (2008) compares research to a form of ceremony in an attempt to bridge the worlds of the dominant academic sphere, with the indigenous. These approaches informed my analysis as I undertook a process which was mindful, rigorous, and attempted to honour the contributions of the participants. In doing so I aimed to practice 'cultural humility' as I (from a dominant culture) tried to humble myself into other ways of knowing and viewing the world.

I contemplated using poetic enquiry to further analyse and present the data. I enjoy writing poetry and I am drawn to that creative process. However, I felt that re-working the words of the participants would somehow feel like I was doing them a disservice. It would undermine the PAR principle of partnership.

Like Humble (2018, p143) my data analysis was "messy and took unexpected turns from its inception through to writing the results." I created an Excel spreadsheet which utilised a loose open coding process which evolved as I listened and re-listened to the voices and stories of the participants. As I noticed parts of their stories which fitted with the emerging trends, I transcribed them as quotes. I present as many of these quotes as possible in the next chapter to allow the voices of our participants to be heard, and in the hope that they will have the impact that the participants desired.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the research process which has occurred. It has outlined the ethics approval process and some theories which informed this. It was shown that PAR principles can complement other ethical approaches such as applying the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. I have provided honest reflections about the strengths and weaknesses of the research process and how this has impacted on the project's findings.

Chapter Six- Findings

"Laugh and cry and tell stories. Sad stories about bodies stolen, bodies no longer here. Enraging stories about the false images, devastating lies, untold violence. Bold, brash stories about reclaiming our bodies and changing the world."

— Eli Clare, Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation (2015)

Introduction

I love this quote by Eli as it resolutely illustrates the power of storytelling. It demonstrates both the power of telling, and the power in listening. It indicates that when marginalised people share their story, it is an inherently political act. An act which challenges the status quo, which queers traditional societal narratives, and which witnesses to the violence which minorities experience.

Throughout this thesis I have sign-posted my intention for the voices of the participants to speak for themselves, to tell their own story with little interference. I want to ensure that the gift of their stories is given the platform that they deserve.

This section will therefore predominantly consist of quotes from my participants. I have organised them into loose thematic sections to help give the reader a sense of order. These sections centre around the key questions we asked during the interviews which surveyed ideas such as *who are the leiti?* And *what challenges do leiti face?* I have provided some minimal commentary to the quotes to give contextual information and provide some simple analysis.

A statistical snapshot of the participants

The following information is drawn from the pre-interview questionnaire and some summary data collected through the interview process. It outlines statistical insights into the identity of the 20 leiti who participated in this research.

- Half of the participants (10) were based on the island of Vava'u and half (10) were based on the 'main' island Tongatapu.

Despite spending most of my time in Tongatapu and only a few days on Vava'u, our split of participants between both islands was 50/50. Due to the small sample size, I avoid making much comparison between experiences of leiti on each island.

- My participants tended to be young adults, 12 of them were aged between 16 and 25.

It is likely that that young adults were the easiest to reach for interviews as they were more likely to have flexible schedules and less likely to have full-time work or as many family responsibilities. Also, young adults are some of the most active in the TLA.

- Most participants (12) lived in their family home.

It is likely this is a result of the average age of the participants. As they were younger, they have less financial independence and are therefore more likely to stay living at home. Also, many leiti reported having family responsibilities such as helping with household chores and childcare.

- Most (14/20) currently felt physically safe in their homes although participants from Vava'u were less likely to as 4/10 did not feel physically safe at home and only half felt psychologically safe.

During the interviews most of the participants reported experiencing some violence growing up, but most now felt like they were physically safe. I am not sure why the participants in Vava'u were less likely to feel safe at home at the point of the interview. My impression while I was there was that leiti in Vava'u seemed more content. Understanding this difference would require further research.

- Most (14/20) thought their house was watertight and 13/20 thought their house would withstand a cyclone 'OK'.

Tonga regularly experiences strong cyclones which is often damaging to houses, especially more traditional styles of fale. Therefore, government and NGO's have focused on supporting the construction of concrete brick structures which are cyclone-safe. This may have resulted in most participants stating that they thought their houses could withstand a cyclone.

- Only 2/20 participants owned their own home and only 4/20 participants paid rent where they currently lived. However, many leiti mentioned that they contributed in a range of other ways to their household such as helping pay bills, babysitting, household chores and the like.

This shows that most leiti are dependent on others for their housing. This lack of independence is concerning as it means they have less agency in relation to their housing and are reliant on the hospitality of family or friends. There could make them vulnerable to exploitation.

- 7/20 leiti anticipated inheriting land or property.

As mentioned in previous chapters, land ownership and inheritance is complicated in Tonga. Some leiti might be denied their inheritance due to their identity. This is explored further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

- 7/20 leiti reported being denied housing or being evicted from their house due to their identity.

This is a significant percentage of participants and likely to be far higher than the general population. Why this happens is explored further in this chapter.

Who are the leiti?

The literature review has shown that leiti identity is complex, dynamic, and in a state of flux. This research project has reinforced this and has produced some more nuanced insights into the way leiti are currently describing themselves. We asked the participants to think back to when they first knew that they were leiti and we talked about that experience, what aspects of themselves helped them identify that way, and how others responded to them.

I recognise and honour that the leiti identity is indigenous and unique to Tonga. This will mean that as a palangi, I only have a limited, fractured understanding of this identity. I do not speak Tongan and as I interviewed participants in English, their 'second' language, I will have missed some of the cultural distinctions in their descriptions of themselves. Some leiti did warn me that using western medical language and ideas such as 'biological sex' to help me understand their identity is inherently problematic. Over time leiti are becoming more familiar with western LGBTIAQ+ language and terminology. Some leiti self-identified as trans women in order to differentiate themselves from gay men.

This research has shown that leiti recognise their gender difference at a very early age, most said between 5-6 years old, or said 'from a very young age' or that they had always known. Most also said that their families also noticed their gender differences early, some supporting this identity, others trying to supress it.

> *"I don't think there was ever a time that I didn't feel leiti. I have always known who I was or what I was … Grandma she knew, I was always looking for women's things to do, even from very young."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (55+)*

This shows that the western conception that some 'boys are raised as girls' in the Pacific is a problematic myth based on historic and misguided ethnographical research. Most leiti said that they were always attracted to 'feminine things':

> *"Growing up I reflect that unknowingly I said to people I was more attracted to female world … I was more attracted (friends) to feminine people, like to play with female cousins, I was already called leiti back then, I was aware what they were calling me, and*

the identity was developing then … I couldn't hide that I was playing more with my

female cousins and classmates … it was more liberating to play with them."

Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)

While this gender identity aspect of their identity was expressed at a young age, most leiti began to recognise their sexual preferences and how this might contribute to their identity, when they were at High School:

"For myself I was trying to find myself, I showered together with the women, I didn't have any feelings for them … We played touch after school, the boys didn't touch any other part of my body but my penis, that turned me on sometimes, and then I realised that I was attracted to the men, not the women."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Some leiti said that seeing other older leiti expressing themselves in public, helped them understand who they were and be confident in their identity:

"I remember when I was still in high school, I used to go with Mum to the hair salon which was owned by a leiti, they cut her hair, cut my hair, and that helped me connect with other leiti, and I thought when I grow up, I could be like them, and now I am following my childhood dream of cutting hair and doing the make-up."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

My western understanding of leiti identity, informed by both literature and interviews is therefore as follows:

Leiti is an indigenous Tongan identity where people who were assigned male at birth (biological males) identify with and express themselves in a feminine-coded way, consistent with a spectrum of gender expression which is unique to leiti. Leiti are usually sexually attracted to cis-gender men.

Other diverse identities

I interviewed two participants who fell outside the traditional 'leiti' identity. This was one fakatangata/trans man and one person who identified as somewhere between fakatangata/trans man and non-binary, describing themselves as a 'she who feels like a he.' In some ways these identities reflected similar identity development to leiti:

"Since I was a kid, since I started school ... I started realising that everything about a man, I like it, and I don't like being around girls and doing girl stuff and I hate people calling me a girl."

Fakatangata/trans man/nonbinary (20-25)

This participant felt that they needed to suppress their identity in order to conform to social expectations:

"I just go out when I was younger, play with the boys, hanging out with the boys. Around 2008 I go back to being a woman, and it was so hard. I had a husband and kids and it was so hard. And now I divorced and go back to normal ... When people are looking at me they are always saying tomboy."

Fakatangata/trans man: Tongatapu (25-35)

Fakatangata seems to be an 'underground' or hidden identity which may make it more difficult to identify with their identity and form community. This participant noted that he never saw other trans-masculine people growing up, he just saw leitis. He did not make friends with many leiti because they were 'girls' and he did not get on well with 'girls'.

"Only met one other person like me ... I look up other transgender people on Facebook, makes me feel stronger ... Only attracted to girls, I don't identify as lesbian because you must be a girl to be lesbian, hard to find lesbians in Tonga ... Its secret (our relationship), we live in the same community and so people think we are just little sister and little sister."

I asked how long he thought they could maintain the secret:

"Forever! Haha just joking, we have a few plans, to go overseas, to run away ... [If the community found out] we would run away to an isolated island where there are no people there, and we would build our own house, until they think that we are already dead."

Fakatangata/trans man/nonbinary (20-25)

Because queer identities other than leiti are not well known or understood in Tonga, it seems to be more difficult to be *fakatangata*, than a leiti. More research would be valuable to understanding these different gender and sexual identities in Tonga and what unique challenges they face. This could help generate more understanding and acceptance within Tongan culture.

Listening to some of the participants stories was a harrowing experience. I expected to hear stories of discrimination, but I was not prepared mentally or spiritually for the serious level of the violence some leiti were subjected to. This section will focus on the challenges that were raised most often in interviews with leiti. These are set down in no particular order.

Bullying

Bullying was a universal experience among the participants. This was common at home and in school. It was both verbal as well as physical. It sometimes came from people the same age as the leiti, and sometimes from adults. It was generally worse during their teenage years and reduced in adulthood.

> *"In high school there was a lot of bullying, my friends they treat me nice, but other kids they make fun of me 'oh you a guy trying to be a woman' and whenever lunchtime if we sharing lunch, all my friends eat together, other people come in from the side mocking saying 'don't eat with them, otherwise you getting some HIV or something' one of my prefects hit me for no reason, that was why I decided to leave school (17)."*
>
> *Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)*

Bullying was a major reason why leiti reported dropping out of school:

> *"At college they didn't accept me, when I put on the make-up, the teachers and students discriminate against me, because I am wearing the boys' uniform but put on the make-up, it doesn't match, so I didn't feel accepted at school I ... It didn't really get better while I was at school and so at grade 5 (17 years) I drop out, because I couldn't face the discrimination and bullying."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)*

One participant reported being expelled from school *because of* their identity:

> *"I was at a boarding school at college which was quite strict. I got kicked out from school because I joined the Miss Galaxy pageant ... I'm so disappointed I didn't get to finish school."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)*

Unfortunately bullying did not end for participants after school, some reported it as a near daily occurrence:

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"They mock you when you wear this, just now when I got out of the car, the boys swear at me … The truth is its very hard for me to be like this but I need to take the risk, it is everyday people swearing at you … They don't like men to do girl stuff, 'you're a man, you should wear men clothes,' because of the culture is very strict"

Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)

Sometimes verbal harassment can be intertwined with the threat of physical violence:

"The bigger the town the more bullying and violence on the road when you walk past… the violence is happening on the street, when a truck of boys drive past they say 'oh get a knife, get something strong' all you can do is walk and be quiet, otherwise it gets worse. I feel safe, except at night time... its the boys coming from the bush..."

Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)

Unfortunately these threats of violence can sometimes become actions, as outlined in the next section.

Violence

I was definitely not prepared to listen to so many reports of violence against leiti. This is due in-part to my own privilege: while I have been fearful of the possibility of violence towards me for my identity as a gay man, I have never experienced it. Violence was a nearly universal experience for leiti growing up, this quote sums up why:

"No it was my very hard time of life, they beated me almost to death for being a leiti. That was for 5 years, I faced the most critical … It's a Tongan thing, its a Tongan mentality, its not a Mormon thing, its not a Palangi thing, its a Tongan thing. 'I'm going to beat the leiti out of you,' is what they said."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Another shocking discovery for me, was learning that most violence was perpetuated by men within their family, usually a father, brother, or uncle. The aim of this violence was to make them more masculine, literally 'beat the leiti' out of them. While the violence did not always come from within the family, there was usually a link:

"She has issues with teachers, she dropped out in form 4 (15-16 years) because her teacher at that time was her father's friend. She thinks her father asked her teacher to

try and get the leiti out of her. Sometimes the teacher tried to beat her up in front of the class and give her more punishment and that's why she ran away from school."

Leiti: Tongatapu (20-25)

Sometimes this violence led to leiti contemplating suicide:

"At one point I was thinking of suicide because of all the pressure, luckily I didn't, I had a friend who I could talk to, he gave me good advice, he is in NZ, he is unforgettable friend as without him I might be died 8 years ago."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Despite this violence, leiti often go out of their way to forgive their family and maintain contact:

"Even though they beat me and treat me bad, I forgive them, I forgive them nearly straight away. And now I am living back with Mum and Dad, they are so excited that I am back. Even though we were raised and beaten I have a very big heart."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

I was humbled to hear stories of leiti forgiving their family and maintaining relationship, despite being the victims of serious violence. It points to their incredible resilience to not just survive these circumstances but to go on to thrive and live their lives in their own way. Even so, this violence is unacceptable and dangerous. There is serious risk that if it is not addressed, more leiti may be killed or take their own lives.

Sexual Violence

We did not ask questions relating to sexual violence as it does not directly relate to our major research interest of housing insecurity and also because sexual topics are viewed as 'taboo' in Tongan culture. One participant did self-disclose an experience of being sexually assaulted and suggests that it may be common experience for leiti.

"What happened at my dad's hotel, I came from school one day, my Grandma told me to wait for Dad … when I went there his head of security called me up, and what happened is I got raped by him [at age 14] … I think it is a common experience [for leiti to be sexually assaulted] there is a lot of untold stories. A lot of the biggest problems we have heard from some of our members, that these cases are done by a brother or even a father who have been doing the sexual abuse. There are many stories that remain

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untold, that stay with us, to stay secure … When we talk about it no one wants to listen, or they deny that this could be happening. Even if we take it to the police, they won't take it as a case."

Leiti: Tongatapu (55+)

This is an area which would benefit from further careful research. If it is a 'common experience' then this adds greater emphasis to the need for programmes and services which address this issue.

Work

One of the emerging themes I noted after my time in Vava'u was that leiti thought they were more likely to be accepted by society if they worked hard. They found that if they avoided trouble, fulfilled a role within the household (such as childcare, cleaning, cooking and the like) then they would be conditionally accepted.

"I was bullied from my family, but I keep trying so they accept me for who am I. So I be like their slave, do whatever they want just for my own happiness. Now I don't regret because all that I done helped them to accept."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Unfortunately, this leads to pigeon-holing of leiti where they feel like they have few other options and they do not feel like they can pursue other career interests.

"It was really hard to find a job at that time due to my gender identity. It doesn't matter if you have a good qualification, it doesn't matter if you have good working skills, when you come for your interview … there are limited jobs, they think oh they are house-keepers, they do the cleaning at home, they do the baby sitting, they do the gardening, they do the event planning and decoration. They didn't think we are capable of different things in life and talented in many things."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

The tendency for leiti to 'drop-out' of school also impacts on their future career prospects:

"I regret leaving school, [at age 17] … I wanted to be a detective. I grew up wanting to be detective because where I grew up, we got robbed many times. But too bad I didn't finish school … Not many leiti are Police ... Leitis can do a lot of things like hair salon, or

can do two jobs at a time, like cleaning … But that's not for me, I tried helping out with
the hair but I'm no good at it!"

Leiti: Vava'u (16-20)

Some leiti feel they have denied employment opportunities due to their identity:

"When I was interviewed to become a PA to some director in the government ministry,
rumours that I happens to be the best in all candidates but because I'm a leiti [I was
turned down] the director needed a girl. I was devastated, physically and mentally
affected by it."

Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)

Other leiti do not have the opportunity to work as their family require them to stay home and look after the house/their parents:

"I have no job, I'm not looking. At home I cook the food, stay in the house, help mother
do the work … I want to find my work but Mum is busy and need the help. I want a job
to bring the money for my needs and to help my Mother."

Leiti: Vava'u (20-25)

This can make leiti feel 'trapped' as they do not have any expendable income of their own and therefore lack independence.

Relationships

Some leiti feel that they have earned a certain amount of societal acceptance by being a 'good leiti', not causing any trouble, contributing to the household, and generally being discreet. This acceptance is tenuous and challenged when leiti sleep with men or start a relationship.

"Here in our country, most of the people are using us leiti, for decorating, cooking,
housekeeping … but when it comes to talk about love, like you say you love someone,
that's when they turn off, no one care, they mocking you, 'what the hell are you doing,
you don't belong here."

Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)

Some leiti feel that they are discriminated against because they sleep with 'straight' men:

"Most Tongans don't like leiti, because the way the man, goes with man, because the wife and husband have to be careful with the fakaleiti when they are around ... The wives are worried their husbands will go have sex with leiti."

Leiti: Vava'u (20-25)

This creates a sense of jealousy and competition between leiti and cis-gender women. One leiti (who uses he/him pronouns) explained the four reasons he thought 'straight men' have sex with leiti:

"1) Because they can't access women ... 2) Because they are closeted gay men who aren't able to come out ... 3) Because of leiti status, maybe they are wealthier and so they think they could get things ... 4) Alcohol, at least they use this as an excuse! There are a lot of men here who have had experience with a man."

Leiti (he/him): Tongatapu (35-55)

There is a sense that things are improving and leiti have more opportunities to have a partner. Some live openly but most still keep their relationships secret:

"Now you can walk into the bar and you can see she is buying the drink, not only for herself but for the boys ... some young girls they having a partner, you look at them and they have reached the stage where they are staying as two partners, still secretly."

Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)

Housing

The intention for this project was to focus on the causes on, and solutions to, housing insecurity of leiti. It became so much more than that, and necessarily so. Housing is only a small part of an individual's complex and intersecting life. It is influenced by a huge range of socio-economic factors. In the case of minorities such as leiti, it is especially important to understand their lives holistically, rather than just focus on one aspect.

The need to understand the 'whole' of leiti lives, is backed up by the fonofale wellbeing model. Pacific lives cannot be viewed in isolation, rather all parts of their lives are uniquely intertwined and influence the other parts. The findings in this research back-up this approach and show how leiti's identities have sometimes led to them being forced out of home.

"2015 I was about to join the Miss Galaxy pageant, he (brother) was running a restaurant, I was working there. When I asked permission for the pageant he said, if you

go pageant you better pack a bag and go (leave their home). And then from that time I was thinking I am a leiti and no one will stop me, so I packed a bag, picked up my phone, called Joey, to come by the centre."

Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)

This quote reinforces the idea that leiti are sometimes conditionally accepted by family. If they are submissive, work hard, and do not draw attention to themselves they might be allowed to live at home. But if they publicly express themselves, in this case by joining the Miss Galaxy pageant, then this brings shame on their families and they might be excluded.

Sometimes there are other tipping points for family, such as when leiti enter relationships:

"When they know that I am having a partner, they said they don't like it, because everyone is talking and everything, so they said maybe you should move in with your partner and get your own life."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

This loss of housing is multifaceted as it represents disconnection from land, *api, and family*:

"When I first heard it, it was really lonely, I was still young, I didn't know where to go, this is where I call home, I was not yet mature enough to know how to run my life."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Sometimes leiti return home even when it is not safe:

"My father hit me every time to try and stop me fakaleiti … this made it difficult to stay home, I was 15, I had to leave, went to find another place, came and asked 'L' stayed with her for two weeks, then went back to stay with family … my father gets angry still, he goes drinking then he comes and hitting me … I likes to stay at home, its my api, but not always safe."

Leiti: Vava'u (20-25)

This create an 'impossible' situation where leiti are having to choose between their home and staying safe. This decision is so fraught that some contemplate suicide:

"It came to a time when she didn't feel welcome in the home, either she walk away from the house, but she didn't know where to go, or she could hang herself."

Leiti: Vava'u (20-25)

Others have felt threatened in their home due their activism and the reaction of people against any changes:

> *"The only time I felt unsafe ... during when we were trying to lobby for change, like trying to decriminalise the colonial laws, that's when all the argument on social media, but nothing happened, yeah kind of threats [posted her address online] they been doing this for five years no, we are getting used to it. There's a threat on social media then just nothing happens ... after two days its gone, so we decided that at the end of the day everyone knows everyone in Tonga because its a small island."*

> *Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)*

Fortunately, other leiti have used the opportunity to move out of their *api* as an opportunity to express themselves and assert their identity:

> *"It is never gonna happen, I have given up, they are never going to accept it [her leiti identity] because the religious thing is very strong for them. They just told me, no you are going to go to hell, this is how we love you, to tell you to change ... I moved to my friend's house to have time to do this [cross-dress] ... I just want to move out of home to do something to express myself ... My parents don't know what I'm doing, they think I am focussing on my study."*

> *Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)*

The link between housing and independence is also well illustrated by this participant:

> *"When I started earning money, I think because of my independence, and when I started to raise kids, it hit me that I needed to build a shelter for them ... Then when I started my own company, I built a good relationship with the banks, and starting the Leitis' Association got me connected to a lot of people, so my reputation was good and so I asked for a loan ... And so, I decided to build. I sort of designed it myself, it went from one story to two storeys. I feel like it was a milestone for me, and the house is already paid off ... I was so determined to show people that I could do it, to show people that I am somebody!"*

> *Leiti: Tongatapu (55+)*

This section outlined the complex and intersecting nature of housing for leiti. Housing insecurity can come from multiple sources, sometimes it is family discrimination, sometimes it is threats of violence, sometimes it happens when they find love. For some leiti leaving home is an opportunity to finally feel free to express themselves, for most it is not a choice and is forced upon them. The consequences of this can be deadly with some leiti seeing no way out and contemplating suicide.

Challenges experienced by fakatangata/trans men

While I only interviewed two fakatangata/trans men during the project, I feel it is important to present their voices. I recognise that a sample size of two is too limited to draw concrete conclusions, but their experiences are important and show both similarities and differences to those of leiti.

My overall impression is that it is more difficult to be fakatangata than leiti in Tonga, mostly because:

"When it comes to transman it is quite difficult, because everyone knows about leiti, but when it comes to fakatangata, it is very difficult, there are some out there, but the community does not accept, there is a great barrier."

Fakatangata/transman: Tongatapu (25-35)

This lack of understanding can lead to issues with family:

"The family they don't like, they don't understand, in the Tongan way, they would never accept it at all. Maybe if they knew about the relationship he would be in big trouble, cut off from the family."

Fakatangata/transman: Tongatapu (25-35)

This can lead to fakatangata being forced to move out of home:

"I moved out last year and go the bush, stay in a house there. I stay there last year until June. I stayed there and feed the pig and plant the Tongan food. I stayed there and thought I was the only person in the world like that … The trans men I know hide in the bush, they don't feel comfortable in town, they isolate themselves."

Fakatangata/transman: Tongatapu (25-35)

And some experience violence:

"People around me didn't understand, my family pushed me to be like a girl and also my friends, also the whole family, Tongan people have an extended family living here, and

they all push me … hitting stuff, sometimes they hit, sometimes they say bad stuff, but mostly they taking the boy stuff away from me."

Fakatangata/transman/nonbinary: Vava'u (20-25)

Some fakatangata have a good relationship with leiti:

"At the school I knew someone who was trans woman, only me and him know about each other, we hang around together and both supported … The relationship is that trans women look after their brother and the trans man look after their sister, so they are safer together … That's why he wants a centre so they can have a space for them all to come and meet and laugh and connect."

Fakatangata/transman: Tongatapu (25-35)

This indicates that there is a possibility of a collaborative approach between leiti and fakatangata. While the other fakatangata participant was less interested in spending time with leiti because they are 'girls' and he 'doesn't like being friends with girls,' he did express trust in the TLA:

"I have a trust in them, I was thinking I could go to the TLA and ask for help and they would transfer me away and they would make me a man, I thought the TLA would do that."

Fakatangata/transman/nonbinary: Vava'u (20-25)

This section has shown some of the similarities and differences between the lived experiences of leiti and fakatangata. As I was only able to speak to two fakatangata, my sample size is too small to draw meaningful conclusions. This is a space which would benefit from further research, especially as fakatangata can feel invisible and alone.

Why do these challenges exist?

Leiti and fakatangata clearly experience deep and sometimes horrifying levels of marginalisation and discrimination. This surprised me as I understood that leiti was an indigenous identity and therefore I assumed they would experience wider societal acceptance.

When I asked leiti to explain why they thought that society treated them differently to other Tongans, many leiti were unsure how to answer. Some said that they had never really thought about the question before, whereas others had trouble expressing such complex thoughts in English. Other leiti provided the following observations:

Tongan culture

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Some participants noted that Western human rights discourses do not fit well with Tongan culture which emphasises collective responsibility.

> "Everyone has a right but here in Tonga, there is a limit, because according to our culture you have to respect, because respect is part of our four main value, in our culture. You have to respect everyone's right. For example, I always talked about, to all the leitis, how we should respect the community, for example even the straight community they don't kiss in public, a couple they don't do their sexual activities in public. But some of the leitis think that human rights can go far beyond ... of course they have the rights but we want to contextualise to the culture here in Tonga."
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)*

This participant expressed the understanding that rights come with responsibilities and that leiti might need to temper their expectations. Some leiti thought that there was something inherent in Tongan culture which is conservative, traditional, and binary in terms of favouring masculine men and feminine woman.

> "I think it is to do with conservative mindset and our culture. In Tonga leitis were not recognised at home and they were so used to being very straight, either he or she, there is no other way. And if you are not he or she, it is kind of a shame in a very masculine society to have that in your family."
>
> *Leiti (he/him): Tongatapu (35-55)*

This participant identified that binary gender identity (either man or woman) was preferred in Tongan society, whereas a feminine boy brought shame to their family.

Christian religion

Discussing this further with the same participant, he thought that actually this might not be inherent in Tongan culture, rather was a result of missionary Christianity.

> "I believe all this was initiated by the missionaries when they first come to Tonga and introduced the teaching of the Bible, the Tongan culture was very influenced by this."
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)*

He thought that perhaps leiti were more accepted as a normal part of leiti society before the missionaries came, but now that history of acceptance has been lost. This conservative form of

Christianity is still strong in Tonga and has been a vocal and powerful force against change such as law reform:

> *"You know the government is run by the religious leaders, a good example of this was CEDAW, when it was going to be ratified in Tonga, religious leaders took protesting, from that protesting Tonga wouldn't sign. This shows how powerful the religious leaders."*
>
> *Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)*

Another participant viewed the oppression coming from the church as actually going against core Christian teachings:

> *"In my opinion it's better to stay home and do prayers because of what they say ... If Tonga is a Christian country, why don't they accept us leitis? Because God accept everyone, but here no. They just use us to decorate the funerals, cook for weddings, then after nothing. After the cooking and everything just laughing. They come over all nice, making friend with us but just pretend ... we need to do a consultation, as they still look down to us ... I think this is not truly Christian."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)*

This participant explains that she feels the churches deceive leiti by pretending to be nice to them when they want things done such as cooking and flower arranging, but then making fun of them and treating them badly. She thinks that this is hypocritical when they preach about God's love for all people.

Tongan views on sexuality

Some leiti blamed themselves for the oppression they faced, due to their sexual proclivities such as:

> *"Most Tongans don't like leiti, because the way the man, goes with man, because the wife and husband have to be careful with the fakaleiti when they are around. The wives are worried their husbands will go have sex with leiti."*
>
> *Leiti: Vava'u (20-25)*

This could indicate a sense of sexual competition between leiti and cis-gender Tongan woman, but also it relates to religion, as leiti are seen as 'temptresses' who lure their husbands to sin. Overall sexual topics are viewed as taboo in Tongan culture, especially for women, and so if leiti are explicitly sexual

in their expression, then this is often frowned upon. This view was reinforced by older leiti, who wanted younger leiti to 'behave' themselves and not bring other leiti into disrepute:

> "And from our end as leiti we need to behave ourself, we also need to be educating our young leitis to behave in society, not in the sense to supress their sexuality, but there are certain values we need to uphold in the society and respect them, to show and role model that, I like to think that I am a respected member of society … This way we can reduce the negative perceptions of us."
>
> *Leiti (he/him): Tongatapu (35-55)*

However, it is not just older leiti who think this, some leiti agree and think that if they are a 'good' leiti they are more likely to be accepted by society:

> "She says it depends, if you are a good leiti and uphold the law then you will be respected. If you are a good leiti, and act lady-like and respect the society, then society will respect you."
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (20-25)*

This kind of sentiment was concerning to me because I think from a western human rights framework. I believe no one should have to work to earn their rights, because everyone should be afforded rights and dignity, simply for being human. My other concern with this line of thinking, is that it reinforces the idea that a leiti's place was in the home. This is incredibly limiting to their dreams and aspirations.

How can their situation be improved?

I asked the participants to talk about what could be done to make changes and improve their situation. Again, many participants found this question hard to answer, or referred back to what was said in the previous section, such as stop the churches from discriminating and the like. Other leiti provided practical suggestions about areas where improvements could be made.

Education

Leiti identified the need for professional development and cultural sensitivity training for professionals in positions of power:

> "There needs to be more sensitisation training in workplaces, especially the Ministry of Health … Some nurses will ask you what your gender is, they know but they still ask, and if you say I am a girl they will say how can you be a girl, you are a boy."

Leiti: Tongatapu (55+)

One leiti thought that if teachers had this kind of training then more leiti were likely to finish school:

> *"They need to be less judgemental … Leitis should stay in school so that they have a career, every leitis needs education."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)*

Another profession which was singled out by leiti as needing professional development about leiti was the police:

> *"These days there is more trust with the police … But in some cases they are not so proactive with the case involving leiti."*
>
> *Leiti (he/him): Tongatapu (35-55)*

Another participant specifically identified the need for police to be more proactive and supportive when investigating incidents of sexual assaults against leiti.

Sharing stories

A variety of participants thought that a good way to make change was through sharing their stories. They thought that people might have more compassion and understanding for them, if they understood more about their journey and the struggles they had overcome:

> *"We would like to share with them what is inside, what struggle we have, so that they will be accepting us into their church as equals."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)*

They envisioned that sharing leitis' stories could be the foundation of a series of workshops or a cultural training programme:

> *"Could run workshops in all the villages to show the people what the leitis what they struggle with, who they really are."*
>
> *Leiti: Vava'u (20-25)*

They hoped that the TLA could run these workshops and that this would help generate understanding among Tongans and therefore create a cultural shift towards inclusion.

Working with religious leaders

Leiti particularly wanted to create change within church spaces and with church leaders. They though that a good place to start was within churches which they are a part of:

> "We still hold on to our religious beliefs, you can't take them out of Tonga, even us we are leitis but we still worshipping God, believe in God, go to church, its not stopping us from lobbying for law reform, even though we face opposition from religious leaders, now we are getting closer to them, getting connected, we are trying to let them know that we aren't changing to make any troubles or affecting any lives, anything in Tonga, we just need a safe space for us."
>
> *Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)*

This pragmatic approach recognises the importance of building bridges between religious leaders and leiti, but also recognises that some of those relationships are already in place.

Law reform

Some recent work had begun to explore pathways towards law reforms which would create greater recognition of and equality for leiti. This was recognised as long and slow work, especially following the push-back from churches against CEDAW. Some leiti were unsure if now was the right time to push for law reform, or if it was an inefficient use of time and resources:

> "Instead of us talking about law reform, we can do a consultation on accepting leitis, this will be more helpful for church leaders and people in the country … we haven't had a leiti struggle with that law, law reform will come later."
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)*

Other leiti thought that cultural and societal acceptance could flow from law reform.

> "The TLA have to do a lot of work, we need to break of the laws, do the law reform first, before we can change people's minds, but I know it will take a long period of time."
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)*

This includes reform of laws prohibiting same-gender sex and crossdressing, as well as inheritance laws:

> "In my opinion (the inheritance laws) needs to be revised to give more protection for the leitis, and women too, to give more recognition to its citizens, so yes I think it needs to be revised, to give more rights to the people of Tonga, I have hope for the future."
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)*

This indicates that leiti are thinking more broadly than just addressing discrimination against themselves, but also thinking critically about how they can create a more fair and equal society overall.

Leiti Refuge

A number of leiti talked about the need for a fit-for-purpose refuge centre, similar to a women's centre. They noted that home is often a dangerous place for leiti, and having somewhere they can go in times of trouble or distress is important:

> "We have a centre for the leitis but it is very small, we need a bigger one, especially for the elderly, because we aren't married, we don't have children, and so family might not want to have you around because you are leiti, they blame you and say it is your fault that you end up like this … We need a safe house for people to come to if they get chased out of home."

> Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)

One participant was already exploring this as a possibility and had gone as far as pitching the idea to the government:

> "I have a vision for my community, I hope and wish that is will happen, that our community lives in peace and harmony with the people. Because now they are not in peace… I want to leave a legacy for myself and my community…. Have submitted a project to the government asking them to build a facility for the leitis. Because some leitis are being chased out of home because of issues with brother or sisters, and so they have nowhere to go. Some relatives accept them, some don't accept them."

> Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Unfortunately, this has not been supported by the government so far. Leiti did note that the TLA national office was being used in this way, but was not fit-for-purpose:

> "Even though we have a drop in centre, its a small space, we hope for a well-designed safe house. Right now if you see our drop in centre its like living in a refugee camp. Its time to change things … This will also help out our elderly members, there are quite a few of us around the age of 50 to 80, going from home to home, some families use them for their work and then move them on. That is what we are wishing for, a good safe space for our members."

Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)

Leiti seemed to be in agreement that those who were most vulnerable to housing insecurity and therefore at-risk of needing emergency or temporary housing were both older and younger leiti:

"TLA needs to have a land and have a facility for elderly people, and also the young ones who have been rejected."

Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)

Leiti did hold out some hope that this was achievable:

"I think if us leitis work together, because some haven't come out of the closet, then we can work together to build a safe place for us and for the acceptance of everyone, we might stand firm for what we dream of."

Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20).

The Tonga Leitis' Association

As the TLA is the primary organisation in Tonga for the support of LGBTIAQ+ people, they are likely to be leading the changes expressed above. The TLA asked me to include questions in the interviews which asked participants their thoughts on the TLA and what more they could do for the benefit of leiti.

History

The following oral histories were shared with me during the research process. They complement the written histories I uncovered in the literature review process. I include these histories here with little commentary as they speak for themselves.

"Me and Joey started a long time ago, with a business doing event planning and then in 2012, me, Joey, Poli and Leilani (Leilani has migrated to Australia now) there were five of us, with the help of the Tongan Family Health Director, he said its important to establish an office, so that all the donors and all those, have a reliable information, records and everything. The last one from 1992 to 2010, we really didn't have anywhere, we called a meeting, had the Miss Galaxy Pageant and that was it. We didn't have anywhere so would meet under a tree and places like that. So it was in 2013 that we moved here, this is our family land. So at the time this was rented, all the rooms. And so at that time I went and talked to all my uncles and aunties and Mum, and asked if I could run the project here, and stay and look after the house and the land. And they accepted. In 2013 we established this drop-in centre. Since then we have started to grow."

Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)

This recollection provides a good overview of the how the TLA came to be, and focuses on securing a national office building. Unfortunately this building suffered damage during cyclone Gita.

> *"It took off the roof, they successful fundraising to fix. Before up to 15 people stay at centre (temporary accommodation) now mix of permanent people and temporary. Some help pay rent. Global Fund (AIDs prevention) help with rent and utilities."*[15]

This fundraising was possible due to the TLA's wide international reach and relationships with a range of international partners, they include:

> *"TLA has project funding from the Global Fund, US Aid, NZ Aid and AUS Aid. They are regularly involved in campaigns, programmes, and research. They have connections to regional and international networks such as ILGA."*[16]

The following participant outlines some of the work which is made possible through these partnerships:

> *"TLA has a long complex history, established 27 years ago, our pioneers, our old members would try and connect our community to the main community … We have our campaign, two years ago we launched our Anti bullying campaign in schools, we do STI/ HIV awareness, promoting safe-sex, we are also doing training in flower arrangement, catering, and event planning training."*

> *Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)*

These histories show the passion and ownership of leiti who volunteer or work for the Association. It shows how a small group have established and grown a grassroots organisation into flourishing and important centre for leiti. It shows their links with international partners and the balancing act of managing these relationships. It also shows their ability to overcome adversity, such as having to replace the roof and renovate the Centre following Cyclone Gita. I observed that many leiti have stories of reaching out for help from the TLA, receiving that help, getting involved in programmes, and then going on to run or implement programmes for the TLA.

What is the TLA doing well?

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[15] Quote from TLA Executive Committee member as recorded in my research journal date 24-9-2019.
[16] Ibid

The TLA asked me to include questions during the interviews which explored how leiti see the TLA, what benefits they have derived from their programmes, and what could be done to improve their work. This section will focus on what the TLA is doing well. Suggestions for areas of improvement will be covered near the end of this chapter.

> *"I joined when I was 16, now I am 28 … TLA has helped me so much, through the trainings and the workshops…"*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (25-35)*

This participant's quote represented a sentiment I heard a lot from leiti in their late 20s to mid-30s. This group came-of-age as the TLA was established and active. As such they often sought help from the TLA, got involved in the work of the TLA, and often now are part of the leadership team and/or are helping run programmes or services.

> *"She has connected with TLA since age 5 … The TLA fights for our rights, advocating for human rights, help people know they can choose their identities, she also learns how to avoid bad attitudes towards each other."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (20-25)*

This leiti has identified the importance of both the personal support she had received from the Association as well as it wider work advocating for human rights and social change. This mix of spheres that the TLA operates in is impressive and is something the organisation is constantly trying to balance. The demands of international donors makes this balancing act particularly difficult.

> *"It's so comfortable to be at the TLA because they are the only people who accept me."*
>
> *Leiti: Tongatapu (16-20)*

This participant reinforced the importance of 'safe space' which the TLA provides through its drop-in centre and through its programmes. She notes that she feels accepted by the TLA, but not by others. She says she is uncomfortable in 'mainstream' society but finds a sense of comfort when she is at the TLA. This sense of finding a refuge is a theme we explore further in subsequent sections.

> *"They do the programmes teaching about the HIV and stuff, this is so important here … When they are doing the teaching, some people come in and are like 'what is HIV' it's good to invite lots of people so they know what is HIV."*
>
> *Leiti: Vava'u (16-20)*

This leiti noted the importance of some of the Association's programmes for her and the educational work of the TLA. She noted the value of people learning about HIV and how they invite a lot of people to be involved.

> *"The TLA do the pageants and the netball and stuff but here in Vava'u we normally do every Wednesday, we have a group show with all leitis, that's the only one things that we do to get together with the leitis, we get paid. Last year we start a new group. We run a pageant last year. We looking forward because now we have our own office and looking forward to do more events. Tell the leitis about the office, let them know if they don't feel safe they can come here and stay. We do a fundraiser once a month. If one of our leitis have a funeral, we donate 100TOP to the leiti to help them out with their needs."*

> *Leiti: Vava'u (25-35)*

This participant has shown that the Vava'u branch of the TLA is establishing a slightly different identity to the Tongatapu branch, and has a more localised approach to activities. This includes running regular shows where leiti get paid, establishing an office where leiti can access support, and providing welfare support such as monetary contributions if a leiti has a family funeral.

The ongoing question of TLA's core focus

I observed that there is an ongoing conversation within the TLA regarding identity and core membership. The TLA was established specifically to support leiti, but over time has come to be viewed more broadly as a 'rainbow' organisation containing some non-leiti members such as gay men and trans men. These four quotes show the breadth of opinion in regard to formally 'opening up' the TLA to explicitly cater for other identities:

> *"Need to accept the other genders open and come out, so we can work together, stand together and be strong. The TLA just for the leitis – trans women. But now there are transman, bisexuals, lesbians trying to come out, slowly and MSM too. What we need to do is let them come out slowly, support them as this is the only rainbow organisation … If you say LGBTI here in Tonga there might be violence, people throw rocks. So this is why we use leiti."*

> *Leiti: Tongatapu (25-30)*

This quote is representative of many younger leiti I spoke to. These leiti have begun to see the TLA more broadly as a 'rainbow' support organisation and have begun to use the word leiti as an umbrella word

for a range of identities, in a similar way that we might use 'rainbow' or 'queer' in western countries. This group would argue that there is no need for a name change, but that the TLA could be more explicit in including a wider range of identities.

> *"They should change the name to transgender so all those who are not normal … Maybe they will use the octopus … Change from only supporting the leiti people to supporting others like me, not just the leiti but all the transgender and the lesbian and gay."*
>
> *Fakatangata/transman/nonbinary: Vava'u (20-25)*

This quote was from one of two transmen participants who was clear that he would prefer that the TLA changed their name and was more explicitly supportive of other identities. He used the metaphor of an octopus to show how the TLA could reach out their arms (or tentacles) to a range of identities and have many 'branches' in their programmes and services.

> *"Then last year TLA had an education programme and a trans woman invites me. They made me come out of the bush. And now I have people who are like me, and it gets better and we understand each other, because the trans man and trans woman think the same way. Then I joined the Miss Galaxy, then trip to Vava'u and that makes me stronger… Now I am starting to be a leiti, I was hanging with a leiti and gentleman and we went for Tongan kava … and they say hey this one is a man … and I say nah, I'm not a man I'm a leiti."*
>
> *Fakatangata/trans man: Tongatapu (25-35)*

This quote is from the other fakatangata/trans man I interviewed who has been well supported by the TLA to the point where he feels that he is leiti. This shows how dynamic the leiti identity is and may provide an opportunity for ongoing discussions about opening up the TLA. This same participant noted that he did not think a name-change was necessary, unless "there is more members coming from LGBT and they want to push for change ok, but otherwise leave it as is."

> *"When we established this it was only leitis and gay people. Then in 2013 we were becoming more inclusive, because there has been a big fight between the leitis and the lesbians, they were gossiping, so that's how it is, they making fun of the young leitis, so because we are more active, more open, we have come out from those closets … now in 2013 we become more inclusive, now I hear something behind my back, something about wording, the name and … I encourage them to establish an organisation that focus on trans, lesbians, gay men and leave the leiti out of it."*

Leiti: Tongatapu (35-55)

This participant was involved in the establishment of the TLA and represents a perspective that I heard most frequently from an older generation of leiti. They see that their identities are unique, with a foundation in Tongan culture, and therefore they think it is important to maintain the specific focus on leiti for the TLA and do not want to 'dilute' the work of the Association.

These participants have highlighted the dynamic nature of the leiti identity, the way it is evolving over time, and the generational divide in thinking about what is best for the future of the TLA. I would humbly suggest that I have identified an underlying tension which will only be resolved by a slow, deep process of talanoa, which brings together as many perspectives as possible.

Conclusion

This chapter has shared the voices, thoughts, and stories of our leiti participants. It has shown a breadth of leiti experience and has also included voices of fakatangata who share similar journeys. It has added nuance to previous western understandings of leiti identity. This chapter showed that leiti face a range of challenges including bullying, violence, and discrimination which can sometimes lead to them experiencing housing insecurity. It has shown the range of sociological factors and structures which have created oppressive environments and made it difficult or unsafe for them at home. This reflects the range of drivers of housing insecurity outlined in the international literature.

This chapter has also shown how incredibly resilient leiti can be in facing up to these challenges and finding solutions. It has shown their ability to forgive family members for violence and bullying which was perpetrated by them. Finally, this chapter has provided a platform for leiti to share their own ideas about what could be done to create positive changes and help address the systematic challenges they have experienced.

Chapter Seven- Discussion

Fa'aafa for me was this concept of half, and being in-between,

whether was in gender, or the physical and spiritual worlds.

So I pulled from the past, this thing of looking back into the past

and walking backwards into the future.

- Pati Solomona Tyrell, Fa'afa (2017)

Introduction

This project started with what seemed like a simple intent, to undertake collaborative research with the TLA into the causes and solutions to housing insecurity of Tongan leiti. In the end it became much more. Leiti told stories of hardships and triumphs, of challenges and victories, of fear and rejoicing. They gave us insights into who they are, and who they might become. They revealed much about the nature of Tongan society and shared hopes about how this might change.

Housing insecurity is a complex problem which cannot be examined in isolation. The leitis' stories demonstrate how issues with housing relate to socio-economic factors, religious contexts, societal oppression, and lack of government support. The issue is multifaceted, complex, and difficult to solve.

Throughout this thesis I have tried to weave together the different threads of history, context, theory, methodology, methods, and findings. I have been reflexive throughout this process and have provided initial analysis of emerging themes. This chapter will draw together some of the findings with the existing literature to further develop the key themes and draw some conclusions about causes and possible solutions to housing insecurity for leiti.

Key themes

Who are the leiti?

Previous academic literature into the identity of leiti has been fractured and partial, and often underpinned by western assumptions. Partly this is a result of a history of exotification of Pacific countries and their peoples. Leiti, like other gender diverse Pacific identities, have been viewed as a curiosity by ethnographic researchers. As such their research has only provided an 'outsider' lens into leiti lives.

While I am also very much an outsider, I think the PAR principles which underpinned this project, have resulted in a depth of sharing which has provided unique insights into the lives of leiti. This has helped clarify and re-define some of the historic 'myth-making' of western researchers.

This research has shown that leiti are not created or raise to be leiti due to a conscious decision of their family. Most leiti self-identified at a young age and often had to overcome great barriers in order to be able to claim and express that identity. Furthermore, this research has shown that leiti identity includes a complex mix of what western queer theorists might describe as gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. There is no one way to be leiti, but leiti may share some of these traits in common.

As described by Besnier (1997) the leiti identity is a dynamic identity in a state of flux. A major influence is migration between Tonga and western countries, as well as the influence of international donors, all of which introduce leiti to western rainbow identities. These ideas and terms have begun to influence the way leiti see themselves and the words they use to describe themselves.

This research has also raised an internal conversation about the inclusivity of the leiti term and the work of the TLA. It has shown that there is some interest, especially from a younger generation of rainbow Tongans, to ensure that the TLA is open to all non-conforming identities. There is also discussion about whether leiti could be used as an indigenous umbrella term, similar to rainbow, to include a plethora of identities. This is a conversation which will no doubt continue and would benefit from ongoing examination.

Methodology

I hoped that this project could be a PAR project in the fullest sense, despite those with more experience warning me that this was not possible within the confines of a Masters project. PAR takes time and resources. It requires depth of relationships that allow for genuine co-research approaches. It entails these co-researchers moving together through a journey of discovery within an action, reflection, adaption cycle.

The principles of PAR grounded this project and informed me at every stage, but I cannot claim that it was fulfilled. My limited time in Tonga, the limited availability of my TLA research partners, and the inherent limitations of the Masters research project, curtailed our ability to meet the high standards of the PAR methodology.

There were some aspects of this project which came close to PAR ideals. This project was the result of community needs who requested my support to help them explore an issue that they had identified. The community was involved in aspects of data collection and had some input into the process. The community will have some ability to inform the report which is produced to present the findings of this

research, and can use the report as an evidential base to approach funders and the government to work towards positive change and solutions.

Aspects of this project which did not fully align with PAR ideals included the ethics approval process as this required providing fully-formed methods and research process and therefore not allowing for them to be co-created. Data collection was also primarily driven by myself as the outsider research, with only secondary support from my TLA colleagues. I have also undertaken the analysis and processing of the findings in isolation with minimal input from the TLA. Finally, I will have limited capacity to work with the TLA on projects or activism which might arise from the findings and recommendations of this research and therefore will have limited input into the 'action' component of PAR.

As I quickly realised that we were not meeting the high bar set by PAR, I began to adjust the language I used about the project. Rather than calling this a PAR project, I instead referred to it as a collaborative project. Instead of co-researchers I began to refer to my TLA friends as collaborative research partners or colleagues. I believe these terms still help encapsulate the principles of PAR, while allowing room for permutation and reimagination that reflected the limitations imposed on the project.

Ultimately I was forced to make a conscious trade-off between the ideals of PAR research and the realities faced in the execution of the research project. A strictly PAR process would not have worked in these circumstances as my TLA colleagues did not have the disposable time to go on a learning journey with me. They were more than happy for me to come in and undertake the data-collection with their input. This suited their needs as they also sought an 'independent' outsider to provide a 'neutral' space for leiti to share their stories, especially to receive feedback about the work of the TLA.

Overall, this project benefitted hugely from the principles of PAR, even if it did not fully meet their ideals. PAR ensured that this project was safer and more ethical for the participants, it ensured that rapport and trust was built between myself as an outsider and the participants as insiders. It ensured that the topic of the research was driven by the needs of the leiti community. And it will mean that the findings and recommendations are practical and have the potential to be used by the community to make change.

Housing insecurity: A complex problem

According to the 2016 census, Tonga's population is decreasing at a rate of -0.5% per year due to high rates of immigration. This should have a positive effect on housing insecurity as it decreases the pressure on current housing stock. The literature review indicated that Tonga is experiencing a land

shortage due to the policy of allocating land to Tongan men on their 16th birthday. However, my research has not revealed an overall housing shortage.

Despite this lack of housing insecurity generally in Tonga, leiti participants in this project reported a high degree of housing insecurity. Seven out of 20 leiti reported being denied housing or being evicted from their house due to their identity. Six of the participants reported that they currently did not feel physically safe in their home.

The fonofale model of wellbeing encourages us to view the connections between all aspects of wellbeing in a Pacific person's life, as well as the environmental factors that they are surrounded by. This means that we cannot examine leiti housing insecurity in isolation to the rest of their lives as everything is interconnected. I have created a diagram which shows a causal chain of events and pressures that impact on leiti housing security:

Pre-colonisation Tonga:

> Leiti accepted and treated as 'normal' part of Tongan society

Impact of colonisation:

> Colonisation and early missionary activity imposed heteronormative and heteropatriarchal sexuality and gender norms which have become entrenched as 'Tongan values'

Which had the following negative impacts on leiti:

| Bullying | Violence | Discrimination | Limited career opportunities | Dropping out of school | Unsafe to have partner |

And these factors had a cumulative negative impact on their housing security resulting in:

| Unsafe to live in family api | Disconnection or exclusion from family land | Unable to afford to purchase property | Unable to afford to rent property |

Figure 2- progression of housing insecurity of leiti
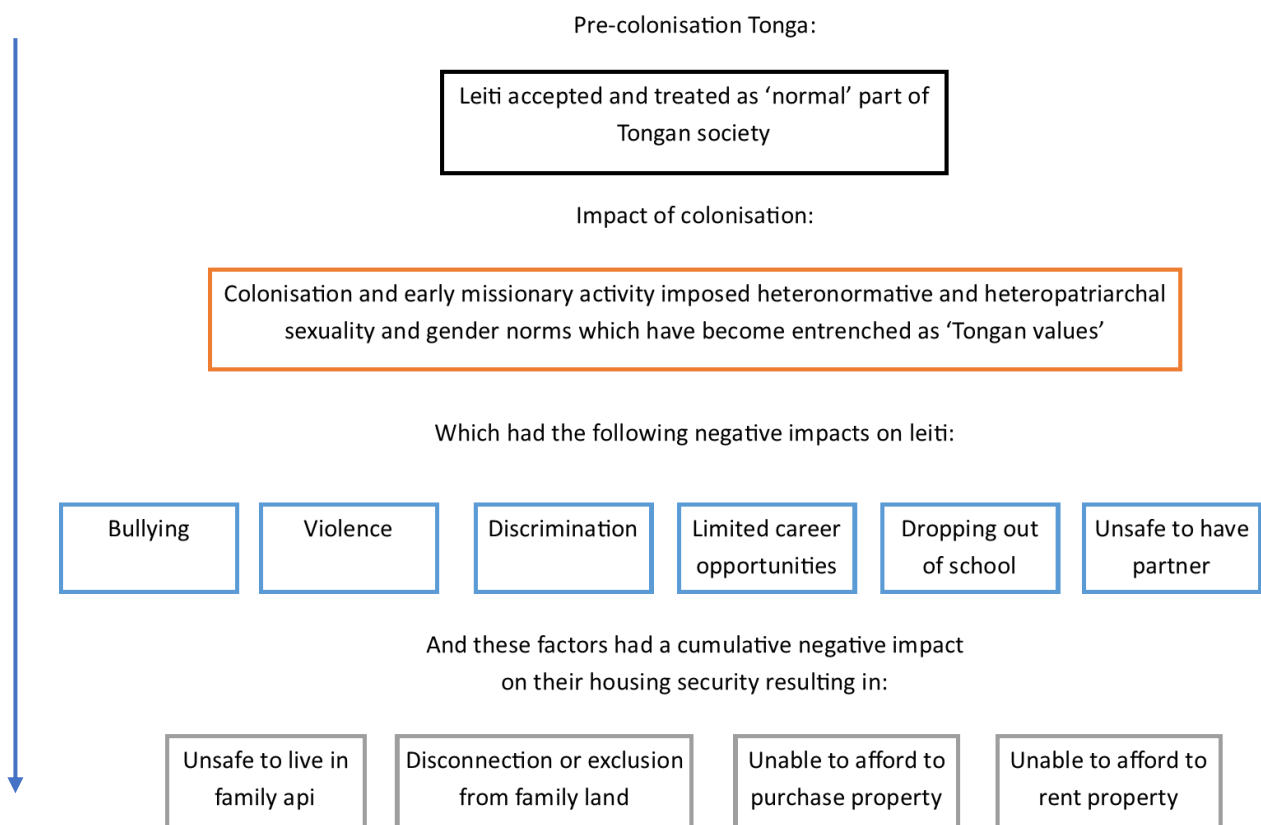
This diagram indicates that prior to colonisation leiti were fully included as a 'normal' part of Tongan society and not discriminated against. This is backed up by the literature review which shows a breadth of sexual and gender diversity across the Pacific prior to colonisation and initial European reports that this was both common and acceptable within those societies.

Colonisation brought conservative Christian ideas about sexuality and gender which is binary, heteronormative, and patriarchal. It assumes that sexuality is only permissible within the confines of heterosexual marriage and that there are only two genders, as created by God. Chapter two of this thesis has shown how these Christian ideals became entrenched within Tongan society and inextricably linked with modern Tongan cultural values.

Participant interviews showed that the most significant challenges that they faced included bullying, violence, job discrimination, and limited education opportunities. These barriers combined with wider societal discrimination negatively impacted their housing security including being forced to leave home, being denied housing, and being unable to afford to access private housing.

These findings reflect similar emerging research focussed on housing insecurity of LGBTIAQ+ people in other parts of the world. In many ways leiti also experience what Glick (2019) described as a "unique constellation of discrimination and compromised social services, putting them at risk for housing insecurity, homelessness, and its associated public health concerns." The risk for leiti is especially significant as it is based on deeply ingrained notions of culture, religion, and colonial history which drives this discrimination.

The intersecting and interconnecting nature of these challenges faced by leiti, demonstrates that any attempts at change will require a system-wide approach which takes into account the multi-dimensional nature of the issue.

Curating change

The overarching solution to housing insecurity experienced by leiti, is widespread culture change. At its simplest, leiti need people to accept them for who they are and not try and 'fix' them. The ultimate aim of this culture change will be to restore leiti to their position pre-colonisation, where they were a 'normal' and recognised part of Tongan society. This kind of culture change is difficult, slow, and requires concerted effort, especially when it involves a small minority group trying to impact the worldview of the majority.

In order to achieve this change, the TLA will be mindful of a key tension in Tonga: maintaining traditions and values while embracing human rights and sustainable development opportunities. Issues like whether the CEDAW should be ratified have revealed that some parts of Tongan society are suspicious of 'outsider' ideas and worldviews such as equality of the sexes. This shows the importance of educating people about the pre-colonial acceptance and inclusion of leiti in Tonga.

Chapter eight has outlined a range of ways that leiti believe change can be made to improve their acceptance and inclusion in society. The primary way is through education and storytelling. They want their voices to be heard and they want people to understand the challenges they have overcome. They want to see education/sensitivity training for professionals such as healthcare workers, the police, and teachers.

They also recognise the need to engage with religious leaders. They have identified the power that religious leaders have in setting cultural norms in their society but have also identified that leiti play key roles within churches and so are not coming to these conversations as outsiders. They recognise that these conversations will be difficult but see opportunities to find common-ground within Christian teachings such as unconditional love, grace, forgiveness, and justice.

Leiti also want to pursue law reforms including changes to anti-sodomy laws, anti-cross dressing laws, and to inheritance laws in order to protect their rights. They understand the difficulty of making these changes and that timing will be crucial. They have learnt a lot from the issues with the CEDAW issue that will inform their approach to law reform. Law reform can only happen in conjunction with wider culture change.

Leiti have also overwhelming noted the need for a fit-for-purpose facility which includes offices, support space, and most importantly, emergency housing. They see this facility being based off a women's refuge model. They recognise that the current centre is not fit-for-purpose and is not sustainable as it is rented.

In order to achieve these intended changes, further talanoa will need to occur in order to prioritise which actions are most important and most achievable. These could be structured into a strategic action plan which outlines short, medium, and long-term goals. The TLA may want to connect with other countries which have achieved similar gains to what they are striving for to see if there are lessons they can incorporate into their plan.

Just as Christian teachings have values and principles that could be utilised by leiti to support their case for change, as does Tongan culture. Values such as Faka'apa'apa (mutual respect), Anga fakatokilalo/loto tō (humility, generosity, and openness to learning) and ofa (love, care, and kindness) could inform any change process. If Tonga was true to these values, then leiti would not be subjected to the bullying, violence, and discrimination they currently experience.

As noted in chapter two, the 2019 Voluntary National Review of Tonga's approach to the Sustainable Development Goals includes the principle of leaving no one behind. This has been categorized into four

main areas of focus which includes: 4) people with diverse sexual orientation. This document states that the government partners with the Tonga Leitis' Association, in order to "implement awareness on gender issues, and screening programs for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases." This commitment should form the basis of a relationship where TLA can push for further changes so that the government can meet its obligations under the SDGs.

The TLA is well-funded by international donors but may be somewhat limited by the conditional nature of this funding. Most funding is project-based and heavily focused on HIV-prevention or events. For the TLA to be most effective, it needs stable consistent funding for core activities such as peer support, awareness raising, advocacy, and education programmes. This would enable the TLA to be a more effective agent of change and a greater support to the leiti (and wider) community.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together the findings and literature of the preceding chapters in order to identify the key themes identified by this research. It shows that this project has outlined a more nuanced understanding of who leiti are and shown that this identity is dynamic and ever-evolving. It has shown that leiti housing insecurity is a complex issue, which intersects and interconnects with every aspect of their lives and wellbeing. It sets forth a theory of change identifying that leiti were accepted and included before colonisation and that they should be restored to this status. It has also set out some possible areas which could contribute to positive change that will require further talanoa and community consultation in order to prioritise and establish an appropriate action plan. Change will not be possible in isolation and therefore the TLA will need allies such as government, NGOs, international partners, and other agencies to lend their support.

Chapter Eight: Concluding thoughts

"We are powerful because we have survived."

- Audre Lorde (2020)

The research journey

Setting out at the beginning of this research I had no idea where it was going to lead. I knew that I wanted to undertake research that was useful, collaborative, and non-exploitative, but beyond that I was happy to go on the journey and see where it took me.

Through my connection with Poli and the TLA, I have had the privilege of being welcomed into a new country and community and had the honour of hearing many of their stories. Some of these stories explored pain and suffering, others included a lot of happiness and hope, all of them displayed incredible resilience. Each story impacted me deeply and I will be forever grateful for this experience.

This research project explored the causes of, and solutions to housing insecurity for Tongan leiti. But it became so much more than that, as we quickly realised that housing insecurity cannot be viewed in isolation to other aspects of wellbeing. The falefono model of Pacific wellbeing became an important lens for the project and guided the conversations we had with participants.

Chapters six and seven outlined the key findings of this research and demonstrated how housing insecurity is a unique challenge for leiti due to the intersectional nature of their identity. Figure 2 has outlined the way in which leiti identity has shifted from being a 'normal' and recognised part of Tongan society, to being a potential cause of exclusion and marginalisation due to the impact of colonisation and missionary Christian understandings of sexuality and gender identity. This has caused a range of negative impacts for leiti and has led to a situation of increased housing insecurity.

The participants in this study have provided a range of useful suggestions about what activities could help create more inclusion and acceptance of leiti, which will lead to increased housing security. These suggestions range from education workshops through to the creation of a fit-for-purpose refuge centre which includes appropriate emergency housing facilities. Many of the suggestions are outlined in the recommendations section below.

This research also produced some unforeseen secondary findings. This includes a more nuanced understanding of leiti identity which further develops other definitions in the literature. This research further rebuffed the western notion that gender diverse Pacific people such as leiti, are 'boys raised as girls' to fulfil a function in either family or wider society. This research also provided a small window

into the world of fakatangata, and I hope further research might provide greater understanding of their experiences and identities.

Another output of this study was the way that the principles of PAR were applied within the constraints of a Masters research project. While an 'ideal' version of PAR was not possible, the principles still guided every aspect of the research and ensured quality and ethical outcomes. I assert that there is an opportunity to explore this further and develop a model of PAR which acknowledges the need for compromise and complexity within a research project, especially those constrained by time and budget.

The Tonga Leitis' Association requested that I also asked participants about their impression of the TLA's services and what other projects they could conduct which would benefit their membership. The overwhelming response was that of respect and appreciation for all the TLA does and how beneficial it has been for the leiti community. Their recommendations for future programmes overlap which their suggestions for action that will help create a more inclusive and affirming society for them.

Recommendations

The following set of recommendations have been collated from leiti suggestions and trends that I observed during participant interviews. These recommendations aim to build understanding and create a culture of inclusion for leiti within wider Tongan society. They intend to reduce housing insecurity by increasing knowledge and acceptance of leiti. Some of these are directed to the TLA and others to wider societal stakeholders such as Government or NGOs. All of these suggestions will require time, resources, and commitment to change.

I humbly offer these recommendations as an output of this research project and in the hope that they could continue to progress the important work of the TLA and continue to reclaim the important place leiti have always had within Tongan society.

1. The TLA continue to talanoa to explore ways of including other Tongans with diverse sexualities and gender identities.

As noted in the findings section, the TLA is Tonga's primary organisation for representing a range of diverse sexualities and gender identities. The TLA however was established primarily for the benefit of leiti and further talanoa could take place to explore ways of including other identities such as fakatangata.

2. The TLA works with researchers to prepare a document which sets out the position of leiti before colonisation and then shows the impact of colonisation.

This research project has revealed an understanding that prior to colonisation leiti were a 'normal' and recognised part of Tongan society. Further historical research could be undertaken to further develop this picture of the position of leiti in pre-colonial Tonga. This would help inform future educational programmes and help ground the advancement of leiti in present day Tonga.

3. Use this research to inform education and sensitivity training which also allow leiti to share their stories and build understanding in different communities and with church leaders.

I hope that the stories shared by leiti during this research could help inform the development of cultural sensitivity trainings/educational programmes which highlight the challenges faced by leiti and attempt to create a culture of inclusion.

4. Develop and deliver specific training programmes to staff and trainees within police, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Education, which educates them about leiti experiences and needs.

This research has shown that leiti could be better supported by professionals within the Police, education system, and health systems. Providing sensitivity training to trainees during their studies could create a new generation of professionals who are sensitive to the unique challenges experienced by leiti and make their practice more inclusive.

5. Cautiously continue law reform activities when the timing is most strategic.

Leiti participants have identified the importance of law reform in improving their situation but have also noted that this is a sensitive topic and progress can only occur when the time is right. I encourage the TLA to continue conversations with key stakeholder about this and be prepared to push for law reform at the opportune time.

6. Work with external agencies to create and implement a peer support training programme for volunteers which includes introduction to mental health and suicide prevention training.

Because the challenges faced by many leiti include sensitive issues such as bullying, violence, sexual assault, and psychological trauma, I encourage the TLA to work with partners to further develop their training for staff and volunteers, especially in areas such as mental health and suicide prevention.

7. Form a multi-party steering group which includes representatives from NGO's, government, diplomatic staff, and the TLA exec to conduct a feasibility project on creating a new, purpose-built leiti centre/refuge.

The above recommendations recognise that increasing housing insecurity for leiti will only occur through a shift towards creating a culture of inclusion. This will be a slow process and so there will

remain a need for temporary and emergency accommodation for leiti who are in dangerous or otherwise tenuous housing conditions. A purpose-built facility could provide this important refuge and also offer a stable base for the TLA to continue their important programmes and services.

Conclusion

As I come to the end of this research journey, I find myself reflecting on it with a full heart and a great sense of optimism. I have been deeply impacted by the stories that have been shared with me and all of the experiences I have shared along the way. The leiti participants have shown incredible resilience in their ability to overcome the significant challenges they have faced and are well on their way to making change that will create a more inclusive and affirming society.

I know that leiti and the TLA are already making many changes and undertaking many programmes. The recommendations above will help to deepen this work and will be most successful will the support of partners from the community, NGOs, development actors, and the government.

I look forward to continuing my relationship with the TLA and understanding my role in supporting this important work into the future.

Prologue

I offer these words of Maya Angelou in tribute to the life and work of Poli Kefu (1980-2021).

Still I Rise

BY MAYA ANGELOU (2013)

You may write me down in history

With your bitter, twisted lies,

You may trod me in the very dirt

But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?

Why are you beset with gloom?

'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells

Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,

With the certainty of tides,

Just like hopes springing high,

Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?

Bowed head and lowered eyes?

Shoulders falling down like teardrops,

Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?

Don't you take it awful hard

'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines

Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?

Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds

At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

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TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Finding a Fale- a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project exploring the causes and solutions to housing insecurity for Tongan Leiti

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is Neill Ballantyne and I am a Masters student of Development Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. This research will contribute to the development of a thesis and report. The Tongan Leiti Association are the co-researchers in this project and will use the findings of this research to advocate for greater housing security for leiti in Tonga.

What is the aim of the project?

This project will explore the causes and solutions to housing insecurity for leiti in Tonga. Your participation will support this research by contributing stories and insights of lived-experience as a Tongan leiti and any challenges you faced with securing or maintaining safe housing. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee.

How can you help?

You have been invited to participate because the Tongan Leiti Association has identified you as someone with lived experience of housing challenges which relate to your leiti identity. If you agree to take part I will interview you at a location where you are most comfortable. The interview will take approximately an hour. I will take an audio recording of the interview with your permission and write it up later.   You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time before *30 October 2019.* If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. This means that the researchers named below will be aware of your identity but the research data will be combined and your identity will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisors and*, and I will read the notes or listen to the audio recording of the focus group. The recordings and notes will be kept securely and destroyed on 31 December 2021.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used to complete my Masters thesis and will be written into a report for the use of the Tongan Leiti Association.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- withdraw from the study before 15 September 2019;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- request a copy of the audio of the interview
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Student:	**Supervisor:**
Name: Neill Ballantyne	Name: John Overton
University email address:	Role: Professor and Programme Director,
ballanneil@myvuw.ac.nz	Development Studies
	School: School of Geography, Environment and
	Earth Sciences
	Phone: 04 4635281
	john.overton@vuw.ac.nz

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convenor: Dr Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

Finding a Fale- a Participatory (PAR) project exploring the causes and solutions to housing insecurity for Tongan Leiti

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: Neill Ballantyne, Victoria University of Wellington.

• I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.

• I agree to take part in an interview **where audio will be recorded.**

I understand that:

• I may withdraw from this study at any point before *30 October 2019* and any information that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.

• The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 31 December 2021.

• I understand that the findings may be used for a Masters thesis and report for the Tongan Leiti Association.

• I understand that the audio recordings will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor.

• My name will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify me.

• I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐   No ☐

• I would like to receive a copy of the audio of the interview and have added my email address below. Yes ☐   No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Participant #_____

Finding a Fale- A research project about housing: Questionnaire

1) What area of Tonga do you live in:_____

2) What is your age range:

    a. 16-20

    b. 20-25

    c. 25-35

    d. 35-55

    e. 55+

3) Please describe your current house (design, size, location, etc)

_____
_____
_____
_____

4) How many people do you live with? _____

5) Does your house have the following (tick all that apply):

    a. Kitchen

    b. Bathroom

    c. Lounge

    d. Bedrooms (How many)

    e. Laundry

6) Is your house watertight (does it keep the rain out)? _____

7) Is it secure (can you lock it up securely?) _____

8) Do you feel safe at home?

    a. Physically _____

    b. Mentally _____

    c. Spiritually _____

    d. Relationally _____

9) Would your house be ok in a cyclone?_____

10) Do you own your home? _____

11) Do you pay rent? _____

12) Will you, or have you, inherited land or property?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

13) Have you ever been evicted or denied housing due to your identity?

Appendix 3- Copy of interview questions

1) Can you remember where you first identified as leiti? What was that like?

2) Did others around you think of you as leiti? Did you need to tell them?

3) How did your family respond to your leiti identity?

4) How did your friends respond to your leiti identity?

5) In what ways are you treated differently because of your leiti identity?

6) Have you ever been evicted, denied housing, or felt like you had to leave home due to your identity?

7) If so, how did that affect you? (physical, mental, spiritual, social etc)

8) Have you ever been denied employment due to your identity?

9) If so, how did that affect you? (physical, mental, spiritual, social etc)

10) How does Tongan society support leiti people?

11) What challenges do leiti face in Tongan society?

12) Why do you think these challenges exist?

13) What changes can be made to improve the lives of Tongan leiti?

14) What more could the TLA do to support leiti?[17]

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[17] Note that this is a sample of the proposed questions. As we used a semi-structured interview technique, these questions operated as a guide for the conversation.

Appendix 4- Research permit for the Kingdom of Tonga

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
NUKU'ALOFA, TONGA

Ref: ORG 1/8 v.19

30th September, 2019

Mr. Neill Ballantyne
102/168 Victoria Sreet
Te Aro, Wellington
NEW ZEALAND

Dear Mr. Neill Ballantyne,

RE: Tonga Government Research Permit

I am pleased to inform, that the Prime Minister's Office has approved your application to conduct your research in the Kingdom of Tonga for your master degree entitled *"Finding a Fale, a Participatory Action Research Project (PAR)"*.

Your proposal has complied with all the relevant requirements under the Government Research Policy as stipulated under His Majesty's Cabinet Decision No.410 of 12 May 2011, except for one condition. At this stage we wish to note that we need a proper research proposal and we will appreciate if you can provide that noting that you have enough time to fulfil this requirement as your research topic is relevant to Tonga.

This permit allows for your fieldwork to be conducted for a period of one months from 17th September to 17th October, 2019.

We look forward to the completion of your report and appreciate your future submission as a valuable resource and insight into the situation of one of the vulnerable group of people of the population.

We wish you all the best with your research and success in your future endeavours during your time in the Kingdom. Should you require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Miss 'Olita Tupou
(*Acting*) **Chief Secretary & Secretary to Cabinet**

Cc: A/CEO, Ministry of Education (Research Unit)

GPO Box 62, Nuku'alofa, TONGA. Website: www.pmo.gov.to; Email: pressroom@pmo.gov.to;   Telephone:
24-644/24615   Fax: 23-888

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