Re-defining unpaid work through the eyes of a taahine Tonga

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Anga fakatonga is the Tongan way of life that is based on love and generosity which are expressed by helping the family and by altruistically assisting or giving of goods or time to help extended family members, friends and the community. Anga' fakatonga is a fundamental attitude and behaviour that is taught to Tongan children and is expected to be practiced and passed to their children as well. Anga' fakatonga is proclaimed as 'ulungaanga o e fonua or anga fakafonua: The way of the land and the people (Morton, 1996, 20).

In an interview, King George Tupou V was asked the question "what makes Tonga unique?"

His response was simple "**kinship**." As a daughter of Tonga and the Pacific, I grew up with a holistic awareness of 'self'. My relational self was and is connected to my ancestors, the land, the waters and the environment in which I find myself in.

Anga fakatonga (the Tongan way) is a defining element of the Tongan identity, and my contextual understanding of how Tongans view "unpaid work**."** It is based on our faa'i kave'i koula (four golden tenants) - of respect (faka'apa'apa), mamahi'i me'a (loyalty) and mou'i fakatokilalo (humility) and most importantly tauhi vā (maintinaing reciprocal relationships). These values form the basis of identity and belonging for Tongans in our home Islands and for Tongans like myself, born and raised across the moana.

In this opinion piece I will go back in order to navigate forward in the hopes of building an awareness that until we get the language right, Pacific people, in my case (Pacific woman) will always be under-counted in unpaid work.

Our Tongan hierarchical system

The Tongan word used to describe belonging is **kau**. Kau means to side with, to be part of, or to take part in. To belong in Tongan society means to be connected to something. Hence, to be isolated from, disconnected to or shunned by - is to cease to exist. I understood then as I do now that my *fatongia* (duties and obligations) was tied to the hierarchical system(s) that governed the way my ancestors lived and saw the world. Not as individual beings, but part of something greater.

During both sea and land migration, the building blocks for my people were the **kāinga** or ha'a, the extended family or clan. Kainga by definition is not restricted to connections through blood, but also extended to relationships via common goals, professions, interest groups or commonalities. Within this system, the most important socio-cultural element is the concept of hierarchy. All social relationships were and continue to be based on the concept of who is high ('eiki) and who is low (tu'a). In the overall context of Tongan society, members of the royal family (who were once considered

demi-gods) are the highest ranked, followed by nobles and then commoners, the lowest ranked of the three-tiered class system.

Within these three tiers, there are three factors that further stratify people. The most important principle is the relationship between **tuofefine** (sister) and **tuonga'ane** (brother), where tuofefine is considered higher. From a young age our brothers are taught and reminded that they must treat their sisters with respect, higher above themselves. As well as a moral obligation to their sisters, the brother/sister relationship traditionally had a socio-economic purpose, to enforce on the descendants on the male side an attitude of assistance and protection towards the children of their female kin. For example, during the birth of a sister's child ('ilamutu) an 'umu (food) is given to his sister on behalf of the brother and his children. His 'ilamutu is said to faiteliha (free of restraint) when dealing with a mother's brother's possessions.

The second factor influencing rank is seen in the generation above, where an individual's paternal kinsmen are considered 'eiki (chiefly/higher) than oneself and the maternal kinsmen is tu'a (commoner/lower) than oneself. There is a Tongan expression that reads - 'Oku te fānau kae pule tokotaha kehe, 'Although you have children someone else has authority over them. This expression is made in relation to the authority a father and his siblings have over children, supporting the fact that paternal side is superior to maternal side. The idea of superiority associated with paternal kāinga, is so significant that even illegitimate children raised by their maternal family are expected to know their paternal lineage in order to know their position in society.

The third factor affecting stratification is based on birth order, where older, outranks younger. This influences the respect and responsibilities given to people. For example, traditionally while the younger son will spend a lot of time in the plantation, the oldest son being of higher rank will get more opportunities to learn about the intricacies of Tongan culture. Land is traditionally passed down the generations through the eldest son, who also inherits plantation allotment to feed his family. For females, the highest honour is given to the eldest sister, who outranks other sisters based on age, hence shown the most respect. Like a perfectly oiled engine, these three factors combined contribute to the functioning of Tongan society and anga fakatonga.

As a Tongan, this hierarchical system is not limited to extended elsewhere. For example, in churches (ministers, deacons, members), in organisations (CEO, senior management, staff), we position ourselves within the space where respect, mana and and service is also given.

Who I am within the scheme of things

In life we wear multiple hats, sometimes leaving behind old ones and wearing new ones as we age. With a PhD in paediatrics I'm often asked to speak at Tongan conference as a role model for other tamaiki Tonga living in New Zealand. A common question asked is "how did you learn about culture." My answer "at the foot of my elders." When I'd complain about how our "service" or "love" doesn't feel reciprocated my grandmother would say – no one is useless, one day you'll see the imoact of tauhi vā (reciprocated relationships), if not in your generation than in the next, because children see, children do.

When in front of a Tongan audience I introduce myself as Dr Seini Taufa, the eldest daughter of Tevita Vake Taufa (Kolomotu'a, Pea, Ha'ato'u Pangai Ha'apai) and 'Ilaise Maama Taufa (Kolonga, 'Ahau, Ha'avakatolo, 'Ohonua 'Eua). I am one of ten siblings, newly married, with nieces and nephews whom I proudly boast about and gladly provide childcare for without the expectation of payment. When my parents migrated to Auckland New Zealand, Fakafeangai Ma'oni'oni (Onehunga Tongan Methodist Church) became my (faith) village. Two years ago, with six other brave Pacific researchers, I left the institution that employed me and its bureaucracy and started up a research company - by Pacific for Pacific.

When I am outside of New Zealand, the explanations are expanded, I am Tongan (and the affiliations expand beyond the villages I am tied too), I am also a proud Kiwi. My vā are to the people mentioned and the places noted above. They are my kainga and make up my ha'a.

As a Tongan daughter, when there is a funeral, a wedding, or a family need there are roles and responsibilities attached to it and I know my place within the scheme of things. During the funeral of my paternal grandfather my place is in the kitchen to prepare food and serve those in attendance. Kin come from near and far, and though they may be as far back as fifth or sixth generation, it is the connections based on names, on villages and on shared interests that keep the reciprocated sharing of duties alive.

Tama tu'u he fa'e - when I am in need, I often seek the assistance of my maternal kin where I transition from being the server to the served. As the eldest daughter, whenever we had guests, my five sisters would tend to the housework, and looking after the children – my job was to learn about our lineage, so I had things to share to entertain our elders. We all had a role to play in what New Zealand defines as Unpaid work.

When trying to wrap my heard around the concept of unpaid work, I went to Statistics New Zealand and discovered that unpaid work within the household includes household work, childcare and caring for another member of the household who is ill or has a disability. If I were to provide a literal translation it would be **ngaue ta'etotongi** – two words that when phrased together sound disconnected negating to describe the relational ties. There is a motive behind doing the work, and an expectation of receiving something in return. As Tongan women, that is not why we do what falls under the category of 'unpaid work.' We do it because it is part of our fatongia and our 'ulunga'anga Tonga. The act of 'unpaid work' as defined in New Zealand, carries the values that define who we are as Tongan people.

If we are to better understand what 'unpaid work' means to women of the Pacific, they need to define what looking after people, volunteering time to interest groups and churches mean to them. From a taahine Tonga, until we invest into understand worldviews and the social structures that govern minority groups we will continue to miss the mark. Unpaid work will be given literal translations that do not include contextual understanding and the service of women will continue to go unnoticed within our systems.