

# ***Kāingalotu: Tonga Saints in the Diaspora***

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I want to begin by defining the terms *kāingalotu* and diaspora. The term *kāingalotu* is actually made up of two important pan-Polynesian terms. *Kāinga* basically means kin, relatives, or land. In some places in Polynesia, *kāinga* means family or kin and in other places it means land. Here are two examples: Samoa has the term *'āiga* and Hawaiian has the term *'āina*. Both terms are cognates (or linguistic cousins) of *kāinga*. Some anthropologists claim that *kāinga* was the name of the first social unit in Ancestral Polynesia around 3,000 years ago (Kirch & Green 2001). In Ancestral Polynesia (3,000 years ago), *kāinga* probably referred to people who are related to one another and also share a communal land (Kirch & Green 2001). This is why the term *kāinga* (*'āiga*, *'āina*) carries the meaning of kinship and land.

*Kāingalotu* is also made up of the word *lotu*. In Polynesia, *lotu* basically means to worship or to pray. It also means religion. *Kāinga* and *lotu* were put together to create the term *kāingalotu*. Individuals who worship (*lotu*) together become kin (*kāinga*). In other words, if you worship together you are *kāingalotu* (kin members). Tongan LDS wards are perfect examples of *kāingalotu*.

The other term that I want to define is diaspora. Basically, diaspora refers to the scattering (dispersing) of people away from an ancestral homeland. For example, a large number of Tongans left Tonga – their ancestral homeland – and they are now scattered in places such as American Samoa, Hawai'i, continental U.S., New Zealand, and Australia. These are the places that we call the diaspora. My presentation will focus on the Tongans who have left Tonga and are now living in different places in the world. I will focus specifically on LDS Tongans and Tongan LDS wards.

I now want to give you some statistical background about Tongans who live outside of Tonga. The number of Tongans abroad are more or less equal to the number of Tongans living in Tonga. Approximately 100,000 Tongans live in Tonga and about 97,540 Tongans in U.S., New Zealand, and Australia. There are 36,840 Tongans in the U.S. (Bureau, U. S. C. 2000), 40,700 in New Zealand (New Zealand Government 2001), and around 20,000 in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). As an anthropologist, I find these statistics to be very interesting. These statistics indicate that the Tongan culture is going through a transformation. Tongans in the diaspora are influencing the development of the Tongan culture. In the U.S., nearly 88 percent of Tongans live in five states: California (15,252), Utah (8,655), Hawai'i (5,988), Texas (1,371) and Washington (1,029) (*A Portrait of Tongans in America*, 2000). Today, we find Tongan stakes, Tongan wards, and Tongan branches in California, Utah, Hawai'i, Texas, and Washington.

The statistics on LDS Tongan *kāingalotu* indicate that there are 4 Tongan Stakes outside of Tonga (LDS 2007):

- Provo Utah Wasatch (Tongan) Stake
- Salt Lake Utah (Tongan) Stake
- Salt Lake Utah South (Tongan) Stake
- San Francisco California East (Tongan) Stake

There is a total in of about 70 Tongan wards and 11 Tongan branches (LDS 2007):

- U.S.
  - 52 Tongan Wards
  - 8 Tongan Branches
- New Zealand
  - 10 Tongan Wards
  - 2 Tongan Branches
- Australia
  - 6 Tongan Wards
- American Samoa
  - 2 Tongan Wards
  - 1 Tongan Branch

The LDS Church plays a vital role in the Tongan diaspora. In fact, during my field research in Maui, I was told by one research participant that the LDS Church is the "gateway to America" (Ka'ili 2005, 2008). Tongans in Maui, both LDS and non-LDS, were assisted in their migration to Maui by LDS Tongan members.

### **Tongans in Maui**

Tongans began migrating to O'ahu, Hawai'i in the late 1950s. Most Tongans migrated to attend BYU-Hawai'i, a L.D.S Church-owned university in La'ie, Hawai'i. It was not until early 1970s that they start migrating to Maui to take advantage of its tourist economy as a way to improve their socio-economic conditions and to help their kin back in Tonga. Maui, the second largest island in Hawai'i, is a major tourist destination for more than 2 million visitors per year. In the 1970s two Tongan families (a L.D.S. family and a Church of Tonga family), moved to Maui, and started a kin-chain migration. There main reason for moving to Maui was to work as tree-trimmers. In the beginning, tree-trimming was the main work attracting Tongans to Maui.

Today, many Tongans are working in other tourist related work such as building stone-fences, woodcarving (*tā tiki*), construction/landscaping (*'iate*), and hotel housekeeping. In 1990 there were only 631 Tongans in Maui. By 2000, the Tongan population has doubled to 1,269—making Tongans second only to Native Hawaiians as the largest Pacific Islander group in Maui (The State of Hawaii Data Book 2000). Most Tongans in Maui live in three major tourist cities: Kahului, Kihei, and Lahaina. Most of the Tongan Christian churches are located in these three cities. In the early 1980s, when the number of Tongans was relatively small, all Tongans in Maui (regardless of denomination) held Sunday services together in the same church building. Over time, as each Tongan denomination increased in size, they started to move to their separate church buildings. Today, there are 11 Tongan separate church congregations in Maui: 3 Tongan United Methodist Churches, 2 Wesleyan Churches, 2 Siasi Tonga (Church of Tonga), 2 Latter-

day Saints (Mormons), 1 'Aho Fitu (Seven-day Adventist), and 1 Maama Fo'ou (New Light). The most visible of these churches are the Tongan United Methodist churches. This is apparent in the posting of Tongan Language Services' schedule on the kiosk outside of the churches. In addition, local newspapers such as the Lahaina news, print Tongan services' schedule on their newspaper.

## Tongan Conception of Space

### *Vā*: Space between People or Things

*Vā*, the Tongan word for space, is not unique to Tonga for cognates of *vā* appear in many Polynesian languages. *Vā* can be gloss as space between people or things. This pan-Polynesian notion of space is known in the Tongan, Samoan, and Tahitian languages as *vā*, while it is known in Maori and Hawaiian languages as *wā* (Tregear, 1891:583-584).<sup>1</sup> *Vā* (*wā*) points to a specific notion of space; it gives a sense of space between two or more points. This is different in many respects to the general Western notion of space as an expanse. *Vā*, according to Māhina (2002), means space, social, and spatial relations. Moreover, Māhina found in his research four dimensions of *vā*: 1) physical, 2) social, 3) intellectual, and 4) symbolic. (personal communication, November 6, 2002). All four dimensions of *vā* intersect and weave together to define and influence one another.

Since *vā* is the Tongan term for both social relations and space, it suggests that spatiality and sociality are inextricably linked together in Tongan ontology. Tongans conceptualize social relations spatially and understand space socially. Thus, for Tongans, human relationships are both socially and spatially constituted. When *vā* is used in the context of objects, it refers to the physical space between the objects. However, when it is used in the context of people, it refers to the social spaces between individuals or groups. It is a social space that both relates and connects individuals and groups to one another. For *kāinga* (kin) members, *vā* refers to the social spaces that are created between *kāinga* who are woven (connected) together genealogically. In this sense, *vā* can be construed as genealogical spaces. How is *vā* created in the first place? It appears that *vā* is created out of the genealogical *lalava/lālanga* (binding/weaving) of people in space. Weaving metaphors appear in the ways Tongans conceptualize people and their *hohoko* (genealogy).<sup>2</sup> This is clearly expressed in the Tonga saying: "'Oku hangē 'a e tangatá ha fala 'oku lālangá," man is like a mat being woven (Rogers, 1977: 157;180). This saying expresses the Tongan idea that a person is woven genealogically from multiple kinship strands.<sup>3</sup> Framing *vā* within weaving, we can then understand *vā* as the social spaces that are created between *kāinga*

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<sup>1</sup> Other Malayo-Polynesian languages have cognates of *vā* or *wa*. For example, in the Cebuano language (in the Philippines), *wanang*, is the term for certain kind of spaces.

<sup>2</sup> The word *hohoko* literary means jointings or connections. It probably refers to the way *kāinga* members are jointed and connected biologically as well as socially.

<sup>3</sup> The Tongan proverb, *Ko e va'ava'a he ko e tangata* (Multiple branches are the nature of man) points to the idea that a Tongan person has numerous social relations (*vā*) created out of their multiple branches of kinship ties. Nothing in nature can compare to the numerous *vā* of humans.

members who are woven together genealogically—like a mat.<sup>4</sup> Genealogy that produces *vā* encompasses various kinds of connections. In other words, genealogy goes beyond mere biological kinship. It not only encompasses biological connection to kin and social connection to land (*fonua*), but it includes social link to important social groups such as fellow church members/church-kin (*kāingalotu*).

Tracing of genealogy is a way of locating one's *vā* with another Tongan. This practice is common when Tongans meet one another for the first time. Through *hohoko* (genealogy) *kāinga* members are socially and spatially jointed. In a formal arena, these social and spatial connections are reaffirmed and reinforced through performance of *fatongia* (reciprocal duties). The performance of *fatongia* creates the flow and circulation of goods and services between *kāinga* members and it simultaneously reinforces and reaffirms the socio-spatial ties of their genealogy.<sup>5</sup>

Because *vā* is a social or relational space connecting people, it suggests that the Tongan notion of space, *vā*, places more emphasis on spaces that link and joint people rather than spaces that divide and demarcate people. In other words, *vā* is a connecting bridge linking one person to another.

### ***Tauhi vā: Taking Care of Spaces Between***

For Tongans, *vā* is an important space; it must be maintained and cared for at all time. Thus the Tongan term *tauhi vā*; it means to take care of one's social/connected space with others. In everyday terms, *tauhi vā* (or *tauhi vaha'a*) is often defined as the value and act of keeping good relations with kin and friends. However, in a more abstract level, *tauhi vā* is the Tongan cultural value and practice of taking care of social/relational spaces between individuals or *kāinga* via reciprocal exchanges of economic and social goods (Māhina 2002).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, through the practice of *tauhi vā*, individuals or *kāinga* linkages are reaffirmed.

Even though *tauhi vā* is easily apparent during formal cultural events—such as christenings, birthdays, *misinale* (church offerings), marriages, and funerals—*tauhi vā* also exists in informal and everyday practices such as mutually sharing of foods and other resources with kin and church-kin. *Tauhi vā* also takes place across various generations. For instance, a person can reciprocate goods to the children or grandchildren of the person from whom he/she received goods from in the past. This will affirm and reaffirm

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<sup>4</sup> The connection of kin members through social space is clearly apparent in the Tongan (or Polynesian) practice of *fe'iloaki*, kissing-cheek-to-cheek, when Tongans come in contact with one another. To me, *fe'iloaki* (lit. mutually knowing one another) appears to be a physical manifestation of the way *kāinga* members intersect and connect in a social space. Maori *hongi* (greeting by pressing nose-to-nose) is a uniquely Maori form of *fe'iloaki*.

<sup>5</sup> Depending on how individuals fulfill their *fatongia*, Tongan socio-spatial relationships can be *vā-ofi* (close-warm relationship), *vā-mama'o* (distant relationship), and *vā-tamaki/vā-kovi* (bad relationship). When *fatongia* are neglected relationships fall apart. In this case, Tongans often say, "kuo motu hona vā," their social space has been broken.

<sup>6</sup> *Tauhi vā* is related to the Samoan phrase *teu le vā* (Shore, 1982:136; Duranti, 1997: 345) or *tausi le va* (Palaita, personal communication, November 18, 2002).

the social spaces across generations. Children are born into multiple pre-existing social spaces. They often inherit the social spaces of their forebears. Thus, *tauhi vā* is the active on-going practice of maintaining and reaffirming social spaces across many generations. *Vā* must be actively maintained—like maintaining a mat—otherwise relationships could potentially fall apart. Here, we can see why *tauhi vā* is defined in everyday terms as keeping good relations. By taking care of one's social spaces with others through reciprocal exchanges, one is maintaining good relations.

## **Tongan Kāingalotu**

Membership in Tongan churches provides important *vā* for Tongans in Maui. The *vā* of church members are created by the fact that they are connected to the same church. By belonging to the same church, it creates a genealogical link among church members (*kāingalotu*). The *kāingalotu* genealogical link gives rise to *vā*. I think of this space as religious social spaces because it is constructed out of one's religious genealogy. Within this space, *tauhi vā* (taking care of one's social space) occurs among church members. In Maui, I became aware of my *vā* with my fellow L.D.S. (*kāingalotu*) church-kin when I met 'Api, a Tongan tiki carver, for the first time at one of Lahaina's tourist markets. In the process of tracing our genealogy—both our *kāinga* (kin) and *kāingalotu* (church-kin) genealogy – 'Api found out that we both belonged to the L.D.S. church/religion. He said: "*te u 'alu atu he Sāpate ke ta 'alu 'o lotu pea ta foki mai ki 'ai 'o kai haka*" (I'll come Sunday so that we can go to church and then will go to my house for dinner). The way 'Api related to me was repeated many times in my interactions with other Tongans who belonged to my church. In Wailuku, (city where I stayed in Maui) Tuki, a Tongan from my church, invited me to his house every Sunday for dinner. He picked me up for church every Sunday and he fed me after church. One day when I was at his house, he said to: "*Ko ho'o ha'u pē mei 'api ki 'api*" (My home is your home). In essence, he was telling me that I am no stranger but *kāinga* (kin member). While in Maui, he offered me food, a place to stay, and the use of his vehicle to travel to my research sites. What is interesting is that the very first time I met Tuki he invited me to his house for dinner. Our *kāingalotu* genealogical ties created a *vā* between me and him. Tuki took care of our *vā*, religious spaces, by picking me up for church and feeding me after church. Many of the Tongan churches encourage their members to take care of their social/religious spaces with their *kāingalotu* (church-kin). Many of the sermons and Sunday school messages are aimed at reminding Tongans of their religious duty to take care of their social/religious spaces with others.

In the diaspora, the *kāingalotu* emerge as a significant form of kin. For Tongans who do not have *kāinga* (biological kin) in the diaspora, the *kāingalotu* performs all the role of the *kāinga*. For example, the LDS Tongan wards (and branches) are actively involved in pulling resources together to helpout with funerals, wedding celebrations, graduation celebrations, and birthday parties. The bishop often acts like a Tongan chiefs. He coordinates the food assignments and the division of labor. Other ward leaders – such as relief society president, high priest group leader, elders quorum president, and ward clerk – are also involved in the gathering of resources and assigning of labor.

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