

MOANA PASIFIKA ISSUES PAPER

Tātatau: Living in the Aftermath of a Tongan Cultural Apocalypse and Moving Towards a Decolonial Future

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Contemporary Tongans have had our tātatau (traditional Tongan tattooing) stripped from us. It is commonly accepted that colonisation has decimated many indigenous cultural practices. However, it is often believed that Tonga was not colonised due to its lack of formal annexation. The disappearance of tātatau shows us the falsity of this belief. The colonisation of Tonga occurred across two dimensions: the spiritual hegemony gained by the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the codification of Tonga's law to reflect Western Christian norms. Although this colonisation was not as apparent as other instances of colonialism in the wider Moana-nui-a-Kiwa,¹ it has still had lasting effects on Tongan governance, cultural and religious expression, indigenous psychology, and tattooing practices. This article explores Tonga's colonial history, showing how Tonga's colonisation fostered the eradication and eventual forgetting of tātatau. The cultural erasure caused by Christian conversion has led to a present-day state of cultural post-apocalypse. This neo-colonial impact has fostered a reluctance to reinvigorate tātatau, as tātatau is deemed sinful due to a colonially facilitated cultural amnesia. The article utilises aspects of tātatau, the Kakala metaphor, and indigenous futurism to unpack Tonga's colonial truths and move towards a decolonised indigenous future of tātatau reclamation.

¹ The islands and oceans that make up the South Pacific, including Micronesia, Polynesia, Melanesia, and Aotearoa.

I INTRODUCTION

In the south-eastern corner of Moana-nui-a-Kiwa sits the Kingdom of Tonga. In these motu,² Atua³ and oral traditions once guided society in a fluid way. One such tradition and important marker of Tongan identity was the tātatau, or traditional Tongan tattoo. Tātatau was a widely worn source of identification, mana,⁴ and pride in pre-colonial Tonga, and was an essential part of Tongan life.

Many of the customs and practices that Tongans lived by for the past six millennia, including tātatau, were disrupted by the cultural erasure caused by the Wesleyan Methodist Church and its missionaries' Tongan crusade.⁵ Consequently, much of the history of tātatau has been lost to the waves of time. However, recent years have seen a revival of tātatau. This resurgence rests on a foundation of decolonial thought and knowledge sharing, and the prioritisation of indigenous (rather than Eurocentric) worldviews.

The story of tātatau is a gateway to a much broader discussion about the dilution and fundamental changing of Tongan culture spurred by the Wesleyan Church. In this article, I challenge our limited understanding of colonisation and religious violence. I argue that, despite the lack of formal incorporation into a colonial empire, Tonga *was* colonised. Through ideological conquest, the Wesleyan Church reshaped Tonga's legal system without the formal annexation that we generally associate with colonialism. The legal codification that followed effectively led to a cultural apocalypse, the effects of which are still felt today. In particular, the criminalisation of tātatau,⁶ which was based on the incorporation of Christian values into Tongan law (and ancillary cultural, religious, and psychological colonisation), has reshaped entirely what it means to be Tongan.

Against this background, I use tātatau as a focal point to illustrate this broader narrative. The history of tātatau helps to explain Tongan social structures — religious, legal and cultural — today. Using principles of decolonisation, the legal and social norms,

2 Motu means island or islands. Here it refers to the islands that constitute Tonga.

3 Gods, deities, and ancestors that Tongans traditionally followed and believed in.

4 Mana has a very complex meaning, but can sometimes be referred to as pride, authority, and prestige.

5 It is appropriate to characterise this as a crusade due to the level and extent of the violence and cultural erasure that occurred: Heneli T Niumeitolu "The State and the Church, the State of the Church in Tonga" (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2007) at 134–143. It was, in short, a cultural apocalypse: William Lempert "Generative Hope in the Postapocalyptic Present" (2018) 33 *Cultural Anthropology* 202 at 203; and Nick Serpe "Indigenous Resistance is Postapocalyptic" in *Dissent* (online ed, Pennsylvania, 31 July 2019).

6 Code of Vava'u (Tonga) 1839, s 8.

practices, and art forms of Tonga that were suppressed by the imposition of Christianity are rediscovered. Finally, by prioritising an indigenous Tongan worldview, we can imagine a decolonised tomorrow where Tongans prioritise connections with their Moanan⁷ brothers and sisters throughout Moana-nui-a-Kiwa to revitalise and revive our tātatau.

Researcher Positionality

This article comes from a place of love for, and pride in, Tonga and anga fakatonga.⁸ Although facets of this research may go against common beliefs regarding Tongan culture and history, unpacking such notions is an important step in helping to bring Tonga back to its rich cultural self. Accepting the status quo in the face of a possible decolonial reality would do Tonga a disservice. Instead, we must meet unpleasant, forgotten truths head on to build a truthful legacy for future thinkers.

Currently, colonisation gives Tongans a stake in their own oppression due to the importance religion holds in self-identification.⁹ Colonial religious impact has meant that Tongans must use Christianity to practice their spirituality and national pride.¹⁰ Being Christian is so wrapped up in modern conceptions of what it is to be ‘Tongan’, which is reinforced by the original Atua system no longer being available to Tongans as a means of spiritual expression. I come to this discussion not to erase Tonga’s modern spiritual practices, but to critique their histories in our Kingdom and weave tātatau back into anga fakatonga as a form of Tongan identity expression.

Overarching Conceptual Framework: The Kakala Methodology

The Kakala is a garland made of fragrant Tongan flowers that is crafted with the sole purpose of being gifted.¹¹ It evokes memories of wrinkled brown eyes and soft hands draping garlands around necks, and feelings of ofa¹² and connection in the making, gifting and

7 “Moana” is a term used throughout the Pacific, meaning the ocean and also refers to the people of Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

8 Anga fakatonga refers to the Tongan way of life.

9 Even the national motto on the Tongan coat of arms, as introduced by King Tupou, is “Ko e ‘Otua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofi’a”, meaning “God and Tonga are my inheritance”.

10 I use the term “Christianity” in this piece to refer both to the religion generally and the modern use of the religion in Tonga (which comprises multiple denominations of Christianity). However, I use the term “Wesleyan Church” to refer to the specific denomination of Christianity that was first introduced to Tonga as a colonising force. I do so to make clear that the political ambitions, practices, ideologies, and values are specific to this branch of Christianity.

11 The practice of gifting is vital in Tonga to forge and strengthen relationships.

12 Ofa refers to love and compassion.

wearing of the floral pieces. More broadly, Kakala promotes community, reciprocity and relationality (an aspect of the Tongan concept of *vā*).¹³

I use the Kakala methodology to ensure that this work is grounded in *anga fakatonga*.¹⁴ The approach is both a foundation for my research and a metaphor for the production and proliferation of indigenous knowledge. It analogises the weaving of the Kakala garland with academic research, writing and presentation as situated within Tongan culture. Although the Kakala methodology is typically employed in data analysis research in education, health, and science, the central values underpinning the methodology can be appropriately applied in a legal context.

Academics wishing to reflect Tongan interests and prioritise a Tongan (rather than Eurocentric) worldview can use the Kakala methodology as a guide. Indeed, similar approaches are used in other Moanan contexts.¹⁵ According to the metaphor, the Kakala making process reflects different stages of academic research and analysis:

- 1: *Teu*¹⁶ – Preparation, scoping, planning and identifying problems and the flow-on action needed;
- 2: *Toli*¹⁷ – Gathering, searching, and collecting relevant information, resources, and expert stories;
- 3: *Tui*¹⁸ – Weaving, writing and creating the body of work with Tongan values in mind;
- 4: *Luva*¹⁹ – Presentation and gifting of the research to the academic and Tongan communities to build knowledge, relationships, and connection;
- 5: *Malie*²⁰ – The shared understanding, relationship building, and impact that the gifting of the research brings and the dialogue it starts; and

13 *Vā* is a Tongan concept which denotes the space between people, relationality, or distance.

14 Konai Helu-Thaman “Kakala: An Indigenous Concept of Teaching and Learning” (Keynote address at the Australian College of Education National Conference, Cairns, 1997); and Seu’ula Johansson Fua “Kakala Research Framework: A Garland in Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education” (2014) 1 RPEIPP REAP 50. The methodology was crafted by Helu-Thaman and developed by Fua.

15 Other Moana research methodologies also do this from different indigenous contexts. For example, the Samoan *Teu Le Vā*, Māori *Kaupapa Māori*, and the Fijian *Vanua* framework.

16 *Teu* refers to conceptualising the design of the kakala in light of the purpose behind its creation.

17 *Toli* refers to gathering the best and most appropriate foliage.

18 *Tui* refers to the crafting of the kakala. Sitting on a woven mat with other members of the community, sharing and working together to create something beautiful and appropriate, both within the cultural context it sits, and within the purpose of its gifting.

19 *Luva* refers to gifting the kakala to the appropriate recipient.

20 *Malie* refers to the *talanoa* and knowledge production within the community that eventuates after (and is facilitated by) the kakala’s gifting.

6: Mafana²¹ – Transformation, connection, and future effects that the creation and gifting of the garland brings.

Thus, this piece of writing is grounded within the Kakala metaphor. As would be expected, not all steps of the Kakala metaphor actioned here (as steps such as malie and mafana naturally sit after and outside of written works), but the overall principles and guiding values underpin every part of this dissertation and its surrounding processes.

Road Map

The conception, preparation, and production of this article has followed the Kakala framework described above. While certain steps are readily visible in written work, others naturally sit outside the writing process. As such, the structure of this article explicitly displays the processes of teu and tui only. Toli persists throughout; many sources have informed this article, from academic papers to family narrations. The publication of this article represents luva. And the discourse within both academic and Tongan communities that will follow will represent malia and mafana.

The article thus begins at its natural conception by discussing the reclamation of tātatau in my kainga.²² I use this experience as both a launchpad and lens for my research and the exploration of the importance of precolonial tātatau. This reflects the teu stage of the Kakala methodology, as it introduces the revival of a culturally significant practice that had been wiped out by a colonial system. It raises the concern that other precolonial traditions facing extinction, as well as precolonial Tongan culture more generally, ought to be restored and revitalised. I continue by, next, exploring the intricacies of the tātatau and its lost art, contextualising the significance of its suppression and eradication.²³ From here, the bulk of my analysis reflects the tui stage as my personal reclamation (and corresponding analysis) takes written form. Next, I contend that despite common belief, Tonga was colonised.²⁴ I base this assertion on a broader understanding of colonisation that focuses on power and control rather than the more obvious colonial markers of settlement and annexation. This analysis, then provides a foundation for my discussion

21 Mafana refers to the knowledge that is created due to the kakala and its gifting within the community. This change happens at both a micro (interpersonally between friends, family members, and small talanoa circles) and macro (wider Tongan society) level. The singular kakala facilitates a small change, but incrementally, with each kakala prepared, made, and gifted informing the next, community and generational change ensues.

22 Kāinga means family.

23 See Part III of this article.

24 See Part IV of this article.

surrounding how religious, legal, and psychological colonialism have operated to fundamentally change Tongan identities, traditions, and customs, including the practice of tātatau.²⁵ I then utilise decolonial conceptions to look to the future of tātatau, Tonga, and intra-Moanan cooperation.²⁶ In doing so, I suggest we move forward by looking back: prioritising indigenous sites of knowledge production and relationship forging to cement tātatau in our Tongan futures.

II TEU: MY KĀINGA'S JOURNEY WITH TĀTATAU

My kāinga, through my father Petelo Isimoto Leka Vaihū, and his father Sililo Sinele Vaihū, hail from Longoteme, a small village bordering the Fanga'uta lagoon on Tongatapu. We have both Tongan and French ancestry.²⁷ My father's tufuga tātatau,²⁸ Croc Coulter, who is of British ancestry, told him about the recording of tātatau by French anthropologists after their arrival in Tonga. Their reports now represent some of the only known documentation of the Tongan tātatau of that time, before the practice was wiped out by the British missionaries.²⁹ Croc was trained by Inia Taylor, a traditional Māori tohunga.³⁰ Taylor earned the Sulu'ape title under the tuition of Sua Sulu'ape Paolo II, a Samoan tufuga tātatau and an important member of the Sulu'ape tattooing family.³¹ My father thought it an exciting meeting of genealogy for a French Tongan to receive his tātatau from a tufuga tātatau with British ancestry, but who was still wholly immersed in Moana kaupapa.³²

25 See Part V of this article.

26 See Part VI of this article.

27 I also have Māori whakapapa (ancestry) on my mother's side, emerging from Ngāti Whātua, Ngā Puhī, Te Rarawa, and Tainui Awhiro. This Māori whakapapa, as well as my residence on Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei soil, heavily influence my subjectivity. Tikanga and whakapapa are central to my assertions, both within this article and my wider existence.

28 Tufuga tātatau means master tattooer.

29 H Ling Roth "Tonga Islanders' Skin Marking" (1906) 6 *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 6; and Peter Suren *Tattooing, Clothing, and Hairdressing in Ancient Tonga* (Friendly Islands Bookshop, Tonga, 2019) at 7.

30 Tohunga is a Māori term for master and has the same meaning as the Tongan 'tufuga'.

31 Daniela Maoate-Cox "Tapping into the Past" Radio New Zealand (podcast, 13 December 2015) <www.rnz.co.nz>; and Maria Tanner "Maria Tanner Spends 5 Minutes with... Croc Tatau: On the Brink of Distinction" *The Cook Islands Herald* (online ed, Rarotonga, 21 March 2012).

32 I will always be grateful of the profound impact that Croc and his mentors' knowledge and craftsmanship had on my kāinga and our relationship to both our Tongan identities and the practices of our ancestors. I am also grateful for the relationship Croc's family formed with ours and how these relationships live on in all of our lives, even after Croc's passing. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that receiving the tātatau from a Moanan tufuga tātatau would have been more appropriate, but was not an option known to us when my father started his tatatau journey. Fortunately, since my father

Receiving the tātatau has been incredibly important for my family. We have been profoundly affected by the cultural joy that came with our father receiving the marks.³³ My siblings, stepmother and I helped to stretch — *toho kili* or *fusi kili* — the skin while he was marked. This journey has not only brought us together as a family, but also brought us closer to our Tongan culture and *ilo tuku fakaholo*.³⁴ The process has acted as a *vaka* for our cultural revitalisation and reclamation.³⁵ Learning the patterns, placements, procedures and stories that ran side by side with the tātatau journey has helped us lean into our Tongan heritage.

Alongside this experience, I have become interested in exploring how Tonga has so comprehensively lost our *tufuga tātatau* and tattooing practices, such that tātatau are rare among contemporary Tongan *kāinga*. As such, and in line with the *teu* stage of the *Kakala* metaphor, I turned to explore Tonga's history of tātatau loss and revival to see what could be gleaned from our past. In doing so, the central role that Christian colonial influence played in this loss became overwhelmingly clear. Most of Tongan history is shrouded in romanticised Christian denial. Tongans (like many other indigenous peoples) are currently living in the aftermath of a cultural apocalypse, with the legacy of these violent changes having been written and understood through colonial Christian lenses.

III TONGAN TĀTATAU: THE LOST ART

Very little information has survived concerning the underlying meaning of Tongan tātatau.³⁶ However, from Samoan, Fijian, and Māori tattooing — and the similarities between these Moanan practices — we can deduce a strong likelihood that the practice of Tongan tātatau was used to communicate history, stories, genealogy and personal tastes.

Tātatau has been present for at least 3000 years; only in the last 150 to 200 years has the practice lapsed. Before Christianity came

received his markings many more Moanan *tufuga tātatau* have starting practicing the art form within Aotearoa, and pre-established *tufuga* have become more prominent within the Aotearoa tattooing community.

33 See appendix I.

34 *Ilo tuku fakaholo* means Family genealogical knowledge.

35 *Vaka* is a boat or canoe, but in this context is used as a vehicle or catalyst for our *kāinga*'s knowledge production and cultural reclamation.

36 Rodney Powell "Tattooing and traditional Tongan tattoo" (9 January 2012) · Matador Network <www.matadornetwork.com>.

to Tonga, tātatau were observed by European explorers as early as 1643.³⁷ Moreover, Tonga is home to the oldest set of tattooing instruments known to humanity.³⁸ The 3000 year old traditional tātatau instruments found in Tongatapu were fashioned from both bird and human bone, in the shape of the hau (tools) that are still used in traditional styles of Moanan tattooing today.³⁹ Anthropologists suggest that the human bone was likely derived from relatives or other loved ones.⁴⁰ This made the kāinga a central part of the process; not just in the tātatau itself, but also in the importance of memory and identity in the changed nature of the recipient of the tattoo.⁴¹

Pre-colonial tātatau was not just an art form or practice of bodily adornment. Its processes were a site of indigenous knowledge creation and cultural expression. The markings themselves were essential to pre-colonial Tongans and their social and spiritual being. When tātatau was suppressed, an integral and deeply rooted part of Tongan cultural creation and navigation died. Having been practised for so long, its suppression was a dramatic act of cultural destruction — and a relatively recent one at that. The prevalence of Christianity and its colonial impact on Tonga continues to limit the practice of tātatau in contemporary Tongan culture.

The Cultural Importance of Tātatau

Aisea Toetu'u and Su'a Sulu'ape Petelo, tufuga tātatau from Tonga and Samoa respectively, have remarked that Tongan tātatau represents Tongan society and the past, present and future journeys of Tongans.⁴² Aisea compared the process of undergoing the tātatau to the vaka building and ocean navigation practices of our ancestors.⁴³

Tongans are fundamentally connected to the ocean, relying on it as a means of survival, transportation, and exploration. Tongans understand the currents, tides, clouds, bird movements and celestial objects, and thus feel at home navigating the waters of Moana-nui-a-

37 Edwin N Ferdon *Early Tonga as the Explorers Saw it, 1616-1810* (University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1987) at 128.

38 "World's oldest tattoo tools found in Tonga" (5 March 2019) Matangi Tonga Online <matangitonga.to>; Michelle Langley and Geoffrey Clark "World's oldest tattooist's toolkit found in Tonga contains implements made of human bone" (7 March 2019) National Indigenous Television <www.sbs.com.au>.

39 Langley and Clark, above n 38.

40 Danielle Maguire "World's 'oldest' tattooing kit discovered in a box years after it was thought to be lost" (5 March 2019) ABC News <www.abc.net.au>.

41 Langley and Clark, above n 38; Geoffrey Clark and Michelle C Langley "Ancient Tattooing in Polynesia" (2020) 15 *The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 407; Michelle Langley and Geoffrey Clark "World's oldest tattooist's toolkit found in Tonga contains implements made of human bone" (5 March 2019) *The Conversation* <theconversation.com>.

42 Rodney Powell "Rebirth of the Tātatau" Tātatau – Tongan Tattoo <tongan_tattoo.tripod.com >.

43 Powell, above n 42.

Kiwa.⁴⁴ Similarly, the *tātatau* maps out one's course in life, providing both guidance and a reminder of the wearer's duty to their community and culture.⁴⁵ As well as connecting Tongans to previous generations, the *tātatau* serves as a *vaka* to communicate ancestral knowledge to *mokopuna*.⁴⁶ Through its multi-faceted use and cultural importance, we see that *tātatau* is not *just* a cultural practice; it is the essence of being Tongan.

Two features of *tātatau* show how it embodies Tongan identity. First, it reflects *tā*⁴⁷ and *vā*^{48,49}. Secondly, it conveys Tongan knowledge with both beauty and utility. *Māhina* has described a vital part of the Tongan reality through the intertwining concepts of *tā* and *vā*.⁵⁰ Time and space. Red and black. Silence and sound.⁵¹ Life and death. The *tā* signifies the red-brown skin as space, and the *vā* is the black ink and disruption within space.⁵² The meaning, knowledge, and relation-building are formed from the meeting of the *tā* and *vā* in a way that is balanced, symmetrical, and culturally and socially appropriate.⁵³

However, it is not just beauty that the markings bestow: they also strengthen the *mana* and cultural knowledge of everyone involved in the process. *Tātatau* engages with both *fuo*⁵⁴ and *uho*^{55,56}. The markings themselves tell a story and serve as visual indications of cultural obligations in a way that utilises both beauty and utility. The actual process of being tattooed also builds relationships between all those involved in the process and uplifts their *mana*. As such, *tātatau* contributes to Tongan cultural aesthetic and the development of Tongan *ako*⁵⁷ and ways of life.

44 Powell, above n 42.

45 Powell, above n 42.

46 *Mokopuna* means grandchildren or descendants. Here, it is used to describe the next generation of Tongans.

47 *Tā* means time.

48 *Vā* means space.

49 *Hūfūnga* 'Okusitino *Māhina* "Tā, Vā, and Moana: Temporality, Spatiality, and Indigeneity" (2010) 33 *Pacific Studies* 168 at 187.

50 At 169 and 187.

51 The sound of the impacting *hau* also went towards naming the practise *tātatau*.

52 I went on a guided Auckland Museum trip (dated 8 October 2020) where *Māhina* spoke of these ideas. See also *Māhina*, above n 49, at 187.

53 The *tātatau* is inherently symmetrical, with the name *tatau* meaning symmetry or balance in Tongan.

54 *Fuo* means form.

55 *Uho* means content.

56 *Siosia* FP *Tofua* 'ipangai, Tongan Academic and Artist (Adam Blackshaw, *Vaka Moana* Series at the National Museum of Australia, 16 June 2009).

57 Knowledge.

Ins and Outs of Tongan Tātatau

The intricacies of tātatau — from who did the tattooing, to who was being tattooed, to the design of the tattoos — formed a holistic practice that was essential to the construction of Tongan identity. In discussing the specifics of the tātatau process, I reinforce the cultural importance of tātatau and, thus, reveal the extent of the cultural loss caused by its suppression.

1 Who was Tattooed and by whom?

Tattooing was universal in pre-colonial Tonga, with both men and women receiving tātatau.⁵⁸ The marooned Sailor William Mariner (Toki Ukamea or The Iron Axe) recounted in 1818 that “there is nobody that does not submit to it as soon as he is grown”.⁵⁹ Moreover, it was not just Tongans who were tattooed in the fashion of the tātatau. Anyone living in Tonga, be they Fijian, Samoan or palagi,⁶⁰ were subjected to social pressure to receive the tātatau.⁶¹ For example, rogue non-Tongan missionary George Vason, who had married a Tongan woman, received the tātatau after immense ridicule from younger Tongan men in communal bathing hours.⁶²

Tongans were tattooed by expert tattooers known as tufuga tātatau, who were highly revered in Tongan society. The nature of the position of tufuga tātatau reveals how integral tātatau was to Tongan cultural expression. Thus, when tātatau died out, so did a fundamental part of Tongan cultural creation and expression. Not only were tufuga tātatau revered as artists, but they were also the holders and proliferators of indigenous knowledge. Thus, tātatau not only *expressed* culture but also *created* it.

High-ranking members of the Tongan Royal Family did not always receive their tātatau from Tongan tufuga tātatau.⁶³ The aristocracy held too much mana for any Tongan to lay hands on them

58 Suren, above n 29, at 8; Alfred Gell *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Clarendon Press, London, 1993) at 101–102.

59 Mariner received his tātatau at the behest of the chief that adopted him when his ship washed ashore when he was 15: William Mariner *An Account of the Natives of the Tongan Islands in the South Pacific Ocean* (2nd ed, Albemarle Street, London, 1818) at 13, 16, 19, and 20.

60 Palagi refers to a white person.

61 Suren, above n 29, at 11.

62 Chris Thomas “Clothed in tattoos: cultural fluidity in George Vason’s *Authentic Narrative of Four Years’ Residence at Tongataboo*” (2015) 19 *Studies in Travel Writing* 109 at 114.

63 Lars Krutak “Embodied Symbols of the South Seas: Tattoo in Polynesia” (3 June 2013) Lars Krutak Tattoo Anthropologist <www.larskrutak.com>.

or draw blood from them.⁶⁴ However, even with the hierarchical nature of Tongan society making *tātatau* acquisition difficult, the aristocracy were not prevented from receiving their marks. Instead, these highly *tapu*⁶⁵ individuals would receive their marks from foreign *tufuga tātatau*, usually Samoan or Fijian, that were not subject to the same highly stratified social hierarchies and rules of *tapu* found in Tonga.⁶⁶ Some oral Tongan histories state that the last Tu'i Tonga⁶⁷ to receive the *tātatau* travelled to Samoa to complete the adornment.⁶⁸

2 *The tattooing process*

The *hau*⁶⁹ involved in the *tātatau* process are sharp, fine-toothed combs of varying widths.⁷⁰ They range from six to fifty teeth, depending on the stage of the *tātatau* process.⁷¹ The *hau* was then hit with a young coconut branch to puncture the skin.⁷² To make the skin taut enough for the *hau* to puncture, the *tufuga*'s assistants, or the family of the wearer, would stretch the skin.⁷³

This description illustrates the communal nature of the *tātatau* process. The need for community within the process itself, coupled with its lengthy duration, creates relationships and shares cultural knowledge among all involved. Who could sit on a mat, spilling blood and ink into the skin, and not share stories and form connections? Furthermore, the *tātatau* process requires everyone to be touching, skin to skin. Participants feel the reverberations of the *hau* throughout their whole body, experiencing every incision and wince up close and personal, meaning that it is a time of great bonding and intimacy.⁷⁴

At the end, there is a ceremony where family and loved ones sing, dance, share prayer and rub the tattoo with *lolo oil*⁷⁵ and

64 Ferdon, above n 37.

65 *Tapu* has many meanings but here it means that something has been imbued with protocol or spiritual importance.

66 *Krutak*, above n 63.

67 The Tu'i Tonga is the titled given to the Tongan monarch.

68 Rodney Powell "The Tu'tātatau Tonga & Tu'tātatau Kanokupolu" (27 June 2010) *Tātatau – Traditional Tātatau Tattoo – Ta Vaka* <tātatau-manulua.blogspot.com >.

69 Tools.

70 Geoffrey Clark and Michelle C Langley "Ancient Tattooing in Polynesia" (2020) 15 *The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 407 at 409.

71 Clark and Langley, above n 41.

72 Ferdon, above n 37; Suren, above n 29.

73 Ferdon, above n 37; Suren, above n 29.

74 This was an experience that made me feel very close to my ancestors. When it was over, the physical *tātatau* on my father's body was a manifestation not only of his genealogy but of the time we all shared on the mat.

75 Also called Tonga oil. This is a fragrant oil made from coconut oil and native aromatics that *tātatau* have used for millennia to hydrate and scent the skin as well as providing topical medicinal benefits.

turmeric. Kāinga sit for hours together on the mat, sharing talanoa⁷⁶ while covered in ink and blood. To share in the simultaneous pain and creation within the tapu process is to experience a moment of cultural importance, nuance and beauty. Losing this precious site of cultural knowledge sharing and production has been a great loss for Tonga, as it has eradicated an important avenue of cultural production and expression.

3 Male Tātatau

Male tātatau, known as the tavaka (boat) or peka (bat), span from the bottom of the ribs to just above the knee.⁷⁷ The different areas of the tātatau signify different facets of cultural significance, and the tufuga completes the tattoo in a specific order to pay homage and respect the tapu of the process.⁷⁸ The tattoos customarily start with the alla pēka — two strap-like shapes that wrap around the bottom of the ribs — and end with the "outrigger" on the navel.⁷⁹ This ending is symbolic of severing the umbilical cord and sealing the body, and imbues the wearer and his family with mana, pride, and responsibility.⁸⁰

These tattoos are significant to Tongans and their sense of identity.⁸¹ In ancient Tonga they acted to distinguish people, their genealogy and village, their tufuga tātatau, as well as their own unique artistic tastes.⁸² In pre-contact Tonga, people washed and applied lolo oil three times a day and men went into battle wearing only a mahi (loincloth or undergarment), meaning that people were frequently seen unclothed.⁸³ The tātatau markings would adorn and identify the men when only their skin was on display and clothe them when they wore little.⁸⁴ Andrew Gell likened the tātatau to a second skin, in both

76 Talanoa means free conversation.

77 There are conflicting accounts of the name of the male tātatau: Powell, above n 42. The name "tavaka" is the contemporary name for the male traditional tātatau as coined by Ai'sea Toetu'u, which he claims ownership over. As such, moving forward, I will refer to the traditional Tongan tattoo (and its contemporary rendition) as tātatau.

78 Suren, above n 29, at 17.

79 Krutak, above n 57; Suren, above n 29 at 17.

80 This knowledge was given to us by my father's tufuga tātatau, Croc Coulter, throughout the tattooing process. This information was given to Croc Coulter by his tufuga, Inia Taylor, who was in turn educated by Su'a Suluape.

81 Rodney Powell "Tātatau - Tongan Tattooing... What One Must Know" (15 October 2009) Tātatau - Traditional Tongan Tattoo - Ta Vaka <tātatau-manulua.blogspot.com>.

82 Powell, above n 81.

83 Richard Wolfram "Toki Ukaema: The story of William Mariner – Port Au Prince" (podcast, 10 January 2020) Apple Podcasts <www.podcasts.apple.com/nz/>; and Suren, above n 29 at 11.

84 In Gell's account, these markings were like underwear and utilised for modesty. We must acknowledge the ethnographer's subjectivity here – he imposes Christian modesty within this understanding. As such, we may question whether there were truly intentions of modesty behind the markings – I do not think that is the case as pre-colonial Tongans were not modest about their bodies: Gell, above n 58, at 103.

physical and spiritual terms, and reiterated the importance of these markings in the wider social structures of Tonga and Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.⁸⁵

4 Designs

The designs and corresponding significance of pre-colonial tātatau have been largely lost to the waves of history.⁸⁶ However, from the few texts and images available, we can see that most pre-colonial designs correlated with ngatu⁸⁷ designs, patterns, icons and motifs. They were also personalised for the wearers' tastes.⁸⁸ A common motif was the fakafu'ihea, or fruit of the hea, which generally involved three circles placed in a triangle configuration, a diagonal line, or onebig dot. The circles symbolise various cultural triads: the three lines of kings; the three main islands in Tonga; three stars; Tonga, Fiji, and Samoa; and the body, mind, and spirit — the Tongan philosophy of holistic wellness. Another common motif was the kiu, a bird symbolising Tonga's creation myth. Tufuga tātatau Rodney "Ni" Powell expands on the meaning behind the tātatau designs.⁸⁹

Lomipeau, Tonga's Legendary *vaka* of the Tu'i Tonga, sits across the back; the three Tongan dynasties are also represented in the *Ngatu 'uli* across the thighs; the *'Ulumotu'a* and *Fahu* – symbolic matriarch and patriarch of Tongan families – is also acknowledged. Other designs include the *Kafa* and the *'Otu Kakala*, representing Tonga's love with nature. The designs continue until a whole picture of Tongan society is created and firmly wrapped around the wearer's body, much like our traditional *Ta'ovala* [dress].

5 Female Tātatau

Compared to the tātatau of male Tongans and female Samoans, pre-colonial female tātatau in Tonga is considered by Tongan tattoo experts to have been less culturally onerous. This is because they imbued relatively fewer cultural obligations and were relatively more decorative.

85 At 103.

86 As facilitated by colonial cultural erosion and the deprioritisation of indigenous forms of knowledge.

87 Ngatu are fine Tongan mats made from the beaten bark of the aute or paper mulberry tree. These mats are then coloured with natural dyes with kupeisi (Tongan designs). Ngatu are a very important aspect of Tongan culture and are gifted on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and celebrations.

88 Roth, above n 29, at 7; and Frances C Koya Vaka'uta "Tattoo and Tapa: Reclaiming Pacific Symbols" (6 July 2016) YouTube <www.youtube.com>.

89 Krutak, above n 63.

Very few resources document pre-colonial female tātatau, both within tattooing literature and in pre-20th century Tongan primary sources.⁹⁰ One account is G Lafond De Lurcy's, who in 1831 saw a Tongan woman with symmetrical white circles marked on her chest and arms, and a small fish tattooed on each thigh.⁹¹

Nevertheless, one must scrutinise missionary narratives with caution and acknowledge the gendered power dynamics at play in 17th century anthropological documentations. It is unlikely that female Tongans had their views properly recorded in missionary accounts.⁹² Everything recorded about female Tongan tātatau must accordingly be seen through a critical lens. I argue that the extant sources are filtered through biased subjectivity and the overwhelming impact white patriarchal gender norms had on anthropology and academia of the time. Given this reality, we know little about the female tātatau's importance. We do not know what they conveyed to people, what was considered attractive, or whether any particular moments in a woman's life were celebrated.⁹³

IV TUI: TONGA WAS COLONISED

I turn now to explore how tātatau was eradicated from Tongan culture. In particular, I discuss how the Wesleyan Church effectively colonised Tonga through religion and legislation. The suppression of tātatau as part of this colonisation ended its longstanding practice, and the continued presence of Christianity in Tongan culture is to blame for a contemporary reluctance to revive the practice.

90 During my research within the manuscripts section of the Auckland University General Library, there was no documentation mentioning female tātatau.

91 Suren, above n 29, at 13.

92 For example, Alfred Gell documents that Tongan females received markings on their hands upon losing their virginity. Europeans of the time were preoccupied with the notions of virginity and female purity while pre-colonial Tongans likely were not. Thus, it may instead have been a way to indicate some other phenomena in a woman's life: Gell, above n 58, at 131; and "Polynesian Tattoo: History, Meaning, and Traditional Designs" Zealand Tattoo <www.zealandtattoo.co.nz>.

93 In saying this, however, we do know that women would get markings across the inside of their fingers when they had sexual intercourse for the first time. However, in a society that did not shame pre-marital intercourse, we can only imagine what significance they gave this, whether it was a mark of guilt, or celebration and pride. Without the burden of 19th century Christian views of sin, the latter is likely true. Further, women would mark themselves when they grieved important members of their family and community, see: Gell, above n 58, at 131.

Defining Colonisation

Tonga is famously regarded as being one of the only non-colonised nations in the Pacific.⁹⁴ Although Tonga was never formally annexed, it was heavily influenced by outside powers, specifically the Wesleyan Church and the British Empire. To this day, Christianity holds power over Tongan society and law.

Colonisation has been defined as “the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area”.⁹⁵ While this describes settler colonialism quite well, settler colonialism is not the kind of only colonial influence. Although the Church did not settle many people on the fonua (land),⁹⁶ key figures embedded themselves (and helped to embed Christian Tongans) into new governance structures to turn Tongan society into a reflection of British Christian values.⁹⁷ Thus, colonisation also captures the relationship between Tonga and the Wesleyan Church. The Church established control over Tonga through the replacement of Atua in favour of Christianity; the imposition of colonial law; the colonisation of Tongan minds; and the eradication of important cultural practices like *tātatau*.

The Colonisation of Tonga

Wesleyan missionaries came to Tonga in the early 1800s to spread the Christian Gospel.⁹⁸ In doing so, they realised that the best way to embed Christianity in Tonga was through politics, due to the prominent role that religion played in Tongan governance.⁹⁹ The Tu’i Tonga system was based on divine right: the Tu’i Tonga claimed ancestral links to the Tongan Atua as descendants of the Atua Tangaloa ‘Eitumatupu’a and a mortal woman.¹⁰⁰ This paralleled the European concept of the divine right of kings. Utilising this European model, the missionaries took the structure of Tonga’s system of divine right and placed the Christian God at its foundation. In doing so, they

94 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 8.

95 “Colonisation” Lexico <www.lexico.com>.

96 Fonua means Land.

97 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 145-147.

98 Sione Latukefu “The case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga” (1969) 25 *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 95 at 95-96.

99 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 136 and 142.

100 Siaoisi L ‘Ilaiu “The Tu’I Kanokupolu Matai Establishment *and Why would Tu’i Tonga Fuanunuiava have vied to become one?* (A genealogical analysis of post 1500 AD new political hegemony in Tonga)” (MA Thesis, Massey University, 2007) at 5 and 96; Ferdon, above n 37 at 69-71.

transferred the legitimacy underlying Tongan governance from the traditional Atua system to Christianity.

Through the missionary Shirley Baker, the Church sided with Tāufa‘āhau I (the future King George Tupou I of Tonga) and convinced him that the Christian God would help him secure the highest political seat in Tonga.¹⁰¹ To solidify his claim, Tupou I was baptised a Christian in 1831.¹⁰² He combined the carrot of the Christian Word with the stick of Christian guns either to convert Tongans to Christianity or, if they refused, execute them.¹⁰³

Tupou I was influenced by both a desire to maintain Tongan independence from foreign powers and his own political ambitions.¹⁰⁴ These goals led to the imposition of the constitutional monarchy, and the simultaneous dilution and freezing of traditional customs through legal, social, and religious instruments.

First, Tupou I went to Ha‘apai¹⁰⁵ and murdered a priestess of the Atua Haehaetahi.¹⁰⁶ Then, he secured Ha‘apai by destroying all of the sacred houses, burning the sacred kava¹⁰⁷ bowls and clubs and desecrating revered vaotapu¹⁰⁸ sites.¹⁰⁹ The conquering of Ha‘apai took only four years.¹¹⁰ The same Church-backed conversion happened in Vava‘u, another island group. By 1835, within a decade of the beginning of the Wesleyan mission, every island in Ha‘apai and Vava‘u was Christian.¹¹¹ Tupou I led another takeover in Tongatapu, the Tongan mainland, killing at least 300 Tongans and similarly destroying the fonua.¹¹² The missionaries saw this as “divine punishment of the heathens for their sins”.¹¹³

101 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 136-138, and 149.

102 Ferdon, above n 37, at 135.

103 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 136-138, and 149.

104 Debra McKenzie “Challenging the Binary of Custom and Law: A consideration of legal change in the Kingdom of Tonga” (PhD Dissertation, University of Victoria, 2017) at 5.

105 Ha‘apai is a group of islands in Tonga.

106 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 136.

107 Kava is a narcotic drink made from mixing water with the dried powder of the Kava root. Drinking kava is an important part of Tongan culture and Tongan ceremonies. Drinking kava together from a shared kava bowl and sharing talanoa is another very important site of knowledge formation and relation building.

108 Vaotapu is the name given to sacred groves of plants.

109 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 136-137.

110 At 137.

111 At 138.

112 At 141.

113 Niumeitolu, above n 5, at 141. See also Sione Lātūkefu *Church and State in Tonga: The Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries and Political Development, 1822-1875* (2nd ed, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia (QLD), 2014) at 110; and Basil Thomson *The Diversions of a Prime Minister* (William Blackwood and Sons, London, 1894) at 350-351.

Tupou was instated as the Tu'i Tonga Kanokopulu¹¹⁴ in December 1845.¹¹⁵ Under his rule, he remodelled the Tongan seat of power in the image of the Western constitutional monarchy. In doing so, he formed a nation with a unified church and state under the Act of Constitution of Tonga (Tonga) 1875, which missionary Shirley Baker (who later became the King's Premier in 1880) helped draft.¹¹⁶

The introduction of the Constitution served two purposes: it cemented Tupou I's claim to the throne within Tonga; and it demonstrated to the outer world that Tonga had the governmental and political stability necessary to be self-governing.¹¹⁷ Once Tupou I converted to Christianity and took the throne, the rest of the Tongan people followed. Although the figurehead of Tonga was ethnically Tongan, this unfortunately came at a cost of dilution and codification of traditional customs. Overall, Christianity was a unifying force and gave the King a new legitimacy to challenge the old order and forge his own.¹¹⁸

Thus, although no nation-state formally annexed Tonga, outside control still existed over its governance. This control was evident through the moulding of the Tongan monarchy after the British version and the shaping of the Tongan Constitution after other constitutions in colonised nations.¹¹⁹ On top of this, colonial agents of the Church (such as Shirley Baker and Basil Thomson) helped draft and write the Constitution,¹²⁰ embedding their Christian morality into the instruments.

Moreover, Britain exercised legal control over Tongan policy. During King Tupou II's reign (which succeeded that of Tupou I), many colonial powers had their eyes on the Moana.¹²¹ This vulnerability to foreign power prompted Tupou II to ally with Britain. A Treaty of Friendship was signed, which deemed Tonga a British protectorate and led to all foreign affairs being conducted through a

114 The Tu'i Tonga Kanokopulu is the title that was given to this line of Monarchs in Tonga.

115 Niemeitolu, above n 5, at 142–143; and Penelope A Lavaka "The Limits of Advice: Britain and the Kingdom of Tonga, 1900-1970" (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1981) at 3.

116 Niemeitolu, above n 5, at 147.

117 Guy Powles "The Tongan Monarchy and the Constitution: Political Reform in a Traditional Context" (paper presented to Australian National University SSGM, Canberra, 2014) at 7.

118 Lavaka, above n 115, at 3.

119 The Tongan constitution was modelled off the Hawai'ian constitution: Powles, above n 117, at 8.

120 Elizabeth Wood Ellem "Chief Justices of Tonga 1905-40" (1989) 24 *The Journal of Pacific History* 21 at 21; Powles, above n 117, at 7.

121 Mele Ikatonga Selisa Tupou "The Process and Outcomes of the 2010 Constitutional Reform in Tonga" (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 2019) at 97.

British consul.¹²² This protectorate status staved off the eyes of other imperial powers. However, Britain's influence in Tonga was also a considerable obstacle to Tongan monarchs in exercising their own political autonomy from the Treaty's signing to its eventual abolition in 1970.¹²³ The British protectorate status meant that the Tongan sovereign had to run all foreign (and most internal) policy decisions through Britain. Thus, British values and morals seeped into Tongan law-making, further reinforcing the sway Britain had over all aspects of Tongan life. As such, the nation was not fully independent until the 1970 removal of protectorate status and the abolishment of the Treaty of Friendship.¹²⁴

In light of the rise and consolidation of Church and British power in Tonga, and despite common belief, it is clear that Tonga *was* colonised. To ignore the role played by the Wesleyan Church in this colonisation would be a naive product of colonial denial.

I will now move to analyse how, once Tonga had been colonised, how colonisation operated. Specifically, I analyse how colonisation operated in a religious sense; in a legal sense; and in a political sense. Within this analysis, I illustrate how these key themes of Tonga's colonisation contributed to the suppression and tabooing of tātatau.

To deny that Tonga was colonised naturally leads to an understanding of all post-Christian changes in Tonga being wholly Tongan-led. This is simply not the case. To discount the immense changes that colonisation brought to Tongan shores (both in terms of religious and legislative imposition) minimises the great violence and cultural degradation that these changes caused our Tongan people.¹²⁵ In utilising decolonial thinking we can unravel the changes that occurred in this tumultuous time in our motu's¹²⁶ history, uncovering the external pressures that prompted the outlawing and eventual forgetting of the tātatau. Acknowledging the external nature of these changes consequently allows us to perceive the cultural legitimacy in reclaiming tātatau and understanding that this reclamation does not go against our ancestors wishes.

122 Treaty of Friendship Between Great Britain and Tonga 155 CTS 439 (signed 29 November 1879, entered into force 3 July 1882); Sela Jane Hopgood "Tonga was Never Colonised, So Why Does It Feel So Colonised?" (20 February 2019) Vice <www.vice.com>; and Lavaka, above n 115, at 13.

123 For examples of British interference frustrating Tongan monarchs exerting their political power, see Lavaka, above n 115, at 24, 43 and 217.

124 Lavaka, above n 115, at 359.

125 The overwhelming rhetoric in Tonga at present is that Tonga was not colonised, and all changes have been self-imposed. This rhetoric is colonial in nature as it delegitimises the efforts of Tongans to revitalise practices that we have lost.

126 Motu means island.

Below, I discuss how this external colonial influence took the form of both religious and legal colonisation, unpacking how Christianity and religious imposition have created lasting change in Tonga, and particularly within the Tongan conception of self. This knowledge is essential to understanding how Tongan cultural erosion is a colonial hangover rather than wholly Tongan-lead, thus making room for reclamation within an indigenous Tongan future.

In a Religious Sense - Christianity

Christian cultural imperialism has its roots in the Pope's authorisation of annexation by discovery in the 15th century. Europeans continued to use the essence of this Papal Doctrine of Discovery to justify colonisation as God's imperative, which dictated that Christians were to subdue non-Christians and convert them.¹²⁷ This imperialist objective underpinned much of the Church's colonial dealings with indigenous lands and peoples throughout history, including the missionary desire for control in Tonga. To facilitate change, the missionaries in Tonga worked to foster an exclusivist belief that Christianity was the only correct faith. They also worked to position Tongan Atua (and cultural expression via *tātatau*) as sinful, demon-like, and heathenous.¹²⁸

Over time, the Discovery Doctrine and the Christian missionary agenda facilitated a seeping of Christian morals into the very fabric of what it meant to be a spiritual Tongan, alienating the original Atua system.¹²⁹ What once was a system of tangible Atua, with essential roles in family and community systems,¹³⁰ has since been overtaken by Christianity. The Atua system in traditional Tonga helped structure not just religion and spirituality, but also social gatherings, governance, and everyday life in Tonga.¹³¹ The significance and wide-reaching influence of the original Atua system meant that supplanting this religion with Christianity would serve to further colonial political aims.¹³²

127 Nicholas V *Romanus Pontifex* (Frances Gardiner Davenport (translator), Carnegie Institution of Washington, Washington DC, 1917); and Robert J Miller "The Doctrine of Discovery: The International Law of Colonialism" (2019) 5 *The Indigenous Peoples' Journal of Law, Culture & Resistance* 35 at 36.

128 Stephanie Lawson *Tradition vs Democracy in the South Pacific Research* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (Mass), 1996) at 88-89.

129 To my knowledge, no Tongans practice these beliefs today.

130 Lawson, above n 128; Ian C Campbell *Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient and Modern* (3rd ed, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2015); and Ferdon, above n 37, at 69-73.

131 Campbell, above n 130; and Ferdon above n 37 at 69-73

132 In doing this, it has stripped Tongans of their once rich, contextual, vibrant, and appropriate spiritual system.

Christianity was, and still is, used as a tool of oppression in Tonga. In the Atua system's place, Christianity has instilled conservative ideologies stunting spiritual expression. In particular, the version of Christianity brought by the missionaries preached bodily modesty and rejected physical adornment, meaning that the once-integral tātatau was seen as sinful and looked down upon.¹³³ This Christianity still binds the majority of Tongans today, and is tightly tied to the obscurity of contemporary tātatau. Thus, the first sense in which Tonga was colonised was through the imposition of the colonial religion.

In a Legal Sense – Legislation and Codification

The second important way in which Tonga's colonisation operated was through the establishment of a codified system of law. Whereas the Tongan legal landscape was previously fluid, colonial influences led to the creation of a written body of law that suppressed Tongan identity. The wars spearheaded by Tupou I in his rise to power were waged and won to convert the people to Christianity. It was known that whoever held religious hegemony in Tonga also held the people, due to the strong link between religious and political control.¹³⁴ Tupou I then imposed formal political uniformity over the islands through the Tongan Constitution, the Vava'u Code, and other legal devices. These instruments effectively codified the colonial Tongan power structure. In this respect, modern Tonga was founded upon the ashes of the previously independent aristocratic chiefly system, developing the backbone of the current system and pushing the Tu'i Tonga line into dereliction.¹³⁵ As I will show, this uniformity and strict hierarchy of deference and obedience, present in both the system of governance and the colonising religion, allowed for the creation of the perfect colonial storm. This storm, in turn, facilitated the effective eradication of tātatau.

1 Vava'u Code

The 1839 Vava'u Code abolished tātatau and other non-Christian forms of cultural expression.¹³⁶ Section 8 of the Code criminalised

133 Suren, above n 29 at 34-35; Amber Dance "How the Samoan Tattoo Survived Colonialism" (6 April 2019) Scientific American <www.scientificamerican.com>.

134 Christine Ward Gailey *Kinship to Kingship: Gender Hierarchy and State Formation in the Tongan Islands* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1987) at 196.

135 Lawson, above n 128, at 90.

136 Other prohibitions included dancing, polygamy, circumcision, and slavery: Code of Vava'u (Tonga) 1839.

tātatau under fear of fine and banishment.¹³⁷ Tupou I drafted the Code with Christian scripture in mind.¹³⁸ Wesleyan influence is evident throughout the Code, with Tupou I pledging Tonga to Christ and codifying Christian values.¹³⁹ It was not just Christian norms immortalised within the Code, but also Tongan customs of the time that the Wesleyan Church deemed acceptable and the imposition of the noble class.¹⁴⁰ As such, the colonial influence of the Code is often overlooked on account of the presence of indigenous customs within the legislation. The fusion of indigenous custom and Christian values gave the new law a false appearance of being authentically Tongan, making the colonial influence insidiously obscure.

2 *The Tongan Constitution*

The Tongan Constitution of 1875 created the constitutional monarchy in Tonga. It aimed to demonstrate to the world Tonga's ability to live up to the "international benchmark" of self-governance.¹⁴¹ To this end, Tupou I received advice from various missionaries and looked to the drafting of overseas constitutions (like Hawai'i, Britain, and Australia) to model the Tongan Constitution. This was in a bid to drive away the colonial powers that wanted to annex Tonga. To retain their independence, Tongans were forced to imitate Western constitutional structures even though the current system had worked for over a millennium.

Tupou I utilised the Constitution to legitimise his rule over Tonga, as well as to prevent annexation.¹⁴² He did this by positioning himself as the divinely-ordained King of Tonga, and by ensuring that the nobility would support him by giving himself the sole power to appoint and remove nobility.¹⁴³

The imposition of the Monarchy and Christianity in Tonga were not just the whims of Tupou I. They were necessary to gain recognition from dominant imperial powers that regarded their constitutional structure as the only appropriate model for any "civilised" country.¹⁴⁴ The adoption of a constitutional monarchy was

137 Section 8 "N.B".

138 McKenzie, above n 104, at 198-199.

139 Code of Vava'u, above n 136 [Vava'u Code]; Tupou I coined Tonga's national motto which is "Tonga and God are my inheritance" "Ko e 'Otua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofi'a".

140 Latukefu above n 98, at 119.

141 Act of Constitution of Tonga.

142 Tupou, above n 121, at 103.

143 Act of Constitution of Tonga, cl 44.

144 McKenzie, above n 104, at 5.

seen as vital in keeping “relative” sovereignty and staving off British annexation.¹⁴⁵ The Constitution was needed to bring Tonga “the type of legal and constitutional machinery which would enable her to gain recognition from the civilised nations and maintain her own independent and stable nation”.¹⁴⁶ However, overemphasising Tonga’s evasion of formal annexation obscures the reality of legal and religious colonisation.

3 The violence of legal codification

The impact of legally codifying Wesleyan values ran deep into Tongan society, extinguishing the fluid system of pre-colonial Tongan governance. It was not just the imposition of foreign values that was disruptive. The calcification of law itself was a stark departure from traditionally fluid systems, such as Kakala and tātatau to develop knowledge, and heavily stratified and tapu social hierarchies to guide behaviour. Moreover, the development of a written system of law led to the forced forgetting of pre-colonial histories, both in terms of the content of the knowledge and how that knowledge was passed on. In relation to tātatau, legal codification caused the forced forgetting of the practice of Tongan tattooing and the inherent knowledge sharing and production that came along with tātatau.¹⁴⁷

Although pre-colonial Tongan governance was heavily stratified and hierarchical, it was also oral and relatively fluid.¹⁴⁸ It developed organically, ebbing and flowing to suit the circumstances of the time. However, after the introduction of the Vava’u Code, this gradual and organic evolution was halted, and the customs and Christian beliefs of the time were fixed into codified law. Understood in this light, this colonial legislation effectively suspended Tongan social evolution in 19th century Christian ethics. In addition, the codification of 19th century Tongan customary traditions has effectively halted Tongan cultural evolution.¹⁴⁹

145 At 5.

146 Sione Latukefu *Church and State in Tonga* (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974) at 209. For examples of clauses that emphasised these freedoms from other countries, see Act of Constitution of Tonga, cls 1, 2, 7 and 11; Lawson above n 128, at 94.

147 We can see the connection between kakala and tātatau here. Where both are sites of Tongan cultural koloa creation, but also sites of knowledge production, where the individuals would have talanoa, create culturally important knowledge and then be able to take that knowledge into the wider communities and proliferate from there.

148 Tupou, above n 121, at 79 and 88.

149 McKenzie, above n 104, at 2. However, this halting has not completely held the development of culture and expression static. Artists and tufuga have flourished (hence the tātatau revival) despite these impositions of black letter law. This shows the importance of expression and the revitalisation in giving Tongans back their cultural koloa.

This violent halting of anga fakatonga's fluidity is dangerous. The knowledge and social rules that would usually flow through generations, — through stories, song, dance, Kakala, weaving and tātatau — and that would be moulded by each generation contextually, has been halted by colonial violence. Similarly, colonisation has stolen the knowledge surrounding tātatau that was handed down, shared in ceremonies and proliferated within the community using Kakala-style knowledge sharing. The immediate aftermath of colonisation restructured Tongan society as a whole, this new and codified reality has dictated Tongan law and wider life ever since. Because of its inflexibility, codified law has frozen tātatau eradication in time, making it harder to regain what was lost. This freezing has, in turn, limited the contemporary application of indigenous legal traditions.¹⁵⁰

The falsity of the Christian status quo being “normal” sustains the legacy of colonial violence. It places the Christian as the normal and objective, and actively works to demonise “other” components of Tongan cultural practice and undermine any attempts at cultural reinstatement and reclamation.¹⁵¹ Entrenching Christianity into law has made Christianity culturally normative. Combining Christian legal doctrines, policies and cultures with documented (and thus calcified and enduring) written colonial histories attempts to justify this ongoing violence. This falsehood attempts to make the imposed Wesleyan worldview appear normal and inevitable, when in reality it is inappropriate¹⁵² and violently colonially imposed.

The Ramifications of Tongan Colonisation

Tuhiwai Smith, Burgess, and Thiong'o theorise that colonisation reaches into our heads, creating a colonisation of the mind.¹⁵³ Although the colonial missionaries no longer exist in Tonga, and Tongans still (predominantly) hold Tongan fonua and political office, I argue that Tongan minds are still heavily colonised. Christianity has

150 McKenzie, above n 104, at 2.

151 Hana Burgess and Te Kahuratai Painting “Onamata, Anamata: A Whakapapa Perspective of Māori Futurisms” in Anna-Maria Murtola and Shannon Walsh (ed) *Whose Futures?* (Economic and Social Research Aotearoa, Auckland, 2020) 207 at 222.

152 I say that it is inappropriate because the Wesleyan Christian church and doctrine emerged out of societies and cultures completely unlike Tonga. We already had an appropriate spiritual system that took into account our fonua, history, and worldview, thus replacing this purpose-made spirituality with one that originated in an entirely different context (with arguable relevance) may be deemed inappropriate.

153 Burgess and Painting, above n 151, at 222; Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd ed, Zed Books, London, 2012); and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, London, 1986).

given Tongans a stake in their own oppression by making Christianity integral to Tongan spirituality. The demonisation of tātatau is not only religious, but also bleeds into the rest of Tongan psychology. Tonga no longer thinks of itself as connected to traditional Atua. Rather, it is common to see anga fakatonga in relation to the alien image of Christ. The positioning of Christ as a universal standard marks Tongan indigenous cultural expression as inferior, heathenous and sinful. Though the missionaries may be gone, they have left a legacy of colonised minds and internalised racism.

Colonialism and Christian religious belief have hijacked the role of intergenerational teachings and respect for elders. Colonialism and Christianity have stripped Tongans of the ability to pass down contextual indigenous knowledge surrounding tātatau and indigenous spirituality. Instead, they have, in my opinion, injected shame, hyper-sexualisation of the human body, modesty, heteronormativity, and stagnation into our sacred Tongan lineages.

Since the criminalisation of traditional tātatau in the Vava'u Code, the practice was largely eradicated from Tonga. It is not uncommon for Tongans, particularly the older generation, to associate tātatau with criminality.¹⁵⁴ For example, my Tongan relatives recently told me "when someone does not do work and has too much time, this is when they get up to mischief and get the tātatau". This continued vilification of our traditional practices has resulted in widespread misinformation surrounding tātatau within our Tongan communities, both at home in Tonga and in the wider diaspora. In researching this article, I encountered many objections to Tongans receiving tātatau on the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Many Tongans on these platforms proclaim that tātatau is not within our histories and is associated with ungodliness, and that the markings were Samoan rather than Tongan (as if only one may have access to our tattooing histories).

Tongans have been forced to forget what it is like to live in a way that is authentic to the spiritual traditions of Tongan Atua, including the wearing of tātatau. This forced forgetting is both a product *of*, and a neo-colonial tool *for*, the imperialist colonial project. It is a vicious cycle: colonisation makes its victims forget their history, and forgetting history perpetuates neo-colonial institutions by limiting conceptions of the past. Through the erasure of the past, an indigenous present and alternative futures come to seem impossible. This reality is exacerbated when tātatau is not just taken out of conversations, but is instead replaced by Christian values. The Kakala

154 Tupou, above n 121.

metaphor can provide clarity here by showing that the colonisation of the mind has led to colonial narratives being inserted back into the community. In the steps of *luva* and *mafana*, we see the proliferation of knowledge being injected back into the community through *talanoa*. Our communities generate and share knowledge through the oral proliferation of information through *talanoa* and deference to authority. Because of this, all of the cultural knowledge gathered after the imposition of Christianity just further reinforces the inserted colonial narratives.

V A DECOLONIAL FUTURE

Making Space to Decolonise

One of the biggest challenges in decolonisation generally is the deep attachment colonised people have to their colonially moulded identities.¹⁵⁵ Tupou I's violent rise to power managed to supplant the traditional belief structures with Christianity.¹⁵⁶ As a result, the spread of Christianity in Tonga fundamentally restructured the Tongan conception of self.

Tongans hold onto these colonial impositions as colonisation has given them a stake in their own oppression.¹⁵⁷ To separate a person from their spirituality and religion is to strip them of something central to their identity. As such, Christianity continues because it is the only religious option available to Tongans. Although this religious expression may feed the soul, Christianity also fundamentally oppresses Tongan cultural expression and indigenous imaginings.

A Decolonial Analysis of *Tātatau*

Because there are no colonisers actively colonising Tonga, the Tongan mindset, legal system, and cultural practises are what need to be decolonised. More specifically, applying a post-colonial lens to this analysis allows Tongans to critically think about the way their cultural practices have been affected by colonial forces. Ultimately, I hope that

155 Margaret Jolly "Custom and the Way of the Land: Past and Present in Vanuatu and Fiji" in Robert Borofsky (ed) *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History* (University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2000) 340 at 355. Although this resource speaks on wider Moana experiences of colonisation, I argue that the same ideas apply to the Tongan experience.

156 McKenzie, above n 104.

157 Amy Allen "Rationalising oppression" (2008) 1 *Journal of Power* 51 at 63.

an indigenous lens can help bring about the decriminalisation of tātatau in Tonga and change the perception of tātatau as sinful and heathenous. Though contemporary Tongans may view tātatau as an idolatrous practice and liken the artform to criminal activity, decolonial imaginings allow us to see that these attitudes are part of the enduring influence of colonialism.¹⁵⁸

Tongans cannot simply pick up exactly where tātatau left off in the 1800s. Re-centring the indigenous worldview and critically viewing the current tātatau resources on-hand lets us scrutinise the few tātatau resources we have as being white-washed and Eurocentric. European ethnographers made these accounts upon a foundation of imperialism. As such, these resources and the works that reference them, including this article, must be viewed within the patriarchal colonial context in which they were made.

Tongans cannot cling to the past; modernisation and fluidity are inevitable as Tongans are essentially fluid and evolving people. It is colonial legal codification that has halted this evolution. Tongans can reintroduce tātatau in ways that acknowledge the oral fluidity in Tongan history without seeking to replicate the ancient past. This reintroduction can be done in a way that pays the correct respect and homage to our tātatau wearing predecessors. Although very few Tongans currently adorn tātatau,¹⁵⁹ the evolution of the patterns and processes used is inevitable.¹⁶⁰ Variations for different families, villages and artists will begin to emerge. The tātatau will no longer be a relic of the past; it will once again be a relevant, personal and appropriate form of Tongan expression. This reality will eventuate as Tongans become increasingly familiar and comfortable with the practice and evolve it to suit their contemporary identities, both within Tonga and the wider diaspora. However, in saying this, it is essential that we do not devalue and vitiate the practice by bending to the whims of passing phases and creating tattoos that are not rooted in Tongan identity. Although it is integral to allow flexibility and fluidity in reinvigorating the ancient practice, to retain the integrity of the tātatau, I am of the opinion that any tātatau should be rooted in the history of the artform. We should be paying close attention to the resources we have surrounding the tātatau, with deviances from tradition being done in a well-thought-out and purposeful way. Any deviations made without purpose and intention would be doing the history of the craft a disservice. In the same breath, it is important that

158 The Code of Vava'u, section 8. "N. B".

159 At the time of publishing, I know of at least six completed male tātatau within the Tongan diaspora.

160 Powell, above n 42.

we do not overly restrict tātatau to the point that tātatau become inaccessible for everyday Tongans. If tātatau is made to be too difficult or intimidating for Tongans to access, then we run the risk of not gaining enough of a stronghold for tātatau to be effectively revived. A fine balance must be struck.

In understanding that Tonga's experience is post-colonial, and that many of its current practices are warped by colonial influence, Tongans can now look to the changes they can make to move into an indigenous future. Tonga's colonial history cannot be denied or ignored. Decolonial thinking reminds us that Tonga cannot revert to pre-colonial times — nor should this be something that Tongans want. Colonial influence is part of what makes Tonga what it is today, but this does not mean that we cannot move towards a more decolonial future (with tātatau at the forefront).

Turning to Tonga's Moana Brothers and Sisters

Having unpacked the history of tātatau with a decolonial perspective, I can now move forward while looking to the past for guidance — thus, walking backwards into the future.¹⁶¹ Cross-cultural revitalisation is a phenomenon where Moanan cultures “rearticulate colonially-suppressed practices [and] customs by learning from other Pacific cultures”.¹⁶² It is the reclamation and reimagining of the Moana based on “new genealogies created through trans-Oceanic cultural rejuvenation”.¹⁶³

This cross-cultural concept is fundamental to the revitalisation of tātatau. Although much of Tongan tattooing history is lost, Tongans can look to the wider Moana to find comparable cultural practices to aid reinvigoration of this lost art. The genealogy that Tongans share with all Moanan cultures means that a cross-cultural outlook will be as authentic as it is innovative. It will be authentic in that the revival will be sourced from geographically and culturally appropriate sources, and it will be innovative in that we will be drawing on indigenous forms of Moana knowledge rather than traditional Eurocentrically recognised “academic” sources. In our knowledge regeneration and construction, we must turn to our Moanan peers to see how their

161 This idea is expressed in the Māori whakatauki ka mua, ka muri (translation: walking backwards into the future).

162 Craig Santos Perez (@craigspez) “in the pacific it is important to not only think about “cultural revitalisation” but to also think about “cross-cultural revitalisation” a phenomenon in which pacific cultures rearticulate colonially-suppressed practices/customs by learning from other pacific cultures...” <<https://twitter.com/craigspez/status/1229136859457941504>>.

163 Kealani Cook (@KealaniCook) “Dude!” <<https://twitter.com/KealaniCook/status/1229288249299914752>>.

cross-cultural Moanan knowledge can enrich and inform our own.¹⁶⁴ In doing so, it is my view that we need to abandon colonial ideologies of ownership and possession and work to rebuild our cultural koloa¹⁶⁵ appropriately, without cultural gatekeeping.¹⁶⁶

We need not suffer colonially imposed realities alone. Our Moanan brothers and sisters face similar realities and hold similar ancient knowledge. The concept of being in good relations and nurturing the *vā* between us is shared across our indigenous peoples.¹⁶⁷ Within Moanan thought, "to be is to be in relation".¹⁶⁸ To re-indigenise our post-colonial present, we must build these good relations across our Moana by sharing our knowledge for the mutual uplift of Moanan cultures. It is through collaboration that we Tongans and the wider Moana can implement an indigenous-led future.

Tātatau will not be the only area that brings together our Moana-nui-a-Kiwa neighbours to help revitalise aspects of culture that colonisation has stripped. *Waka hourua*, or double-hull seafaring, was a navigational practice common across the Moana that also suffered suppression by colonial hands.¹⁶⁹ Indigenous *tufuga* from Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji, Tahiti and Aotearoa (led by Mau Piailug and Hekenukumai Busby) worked in collaboration to piece together the remnants of cultural knowledge surrounding *vaka/va'a/waka* navigation to help revitalise this practice across the Moana.¹⁷⁰ In doing so, the knowledge each nation held combined to produce holistic knowledge for all of the Moana. This holistic borrowing and uplifting that the revitalisers of *waka hourua* have employed remind us that, to revitalise Tongan *tātatau*, it is necessary to take a comprehensive approach, aimed at revitalisation of every aspect of Tongan culture. By looking laterally across Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, we will forge a decolonial path into a thriving indigenous future.

164 Anga fakatonga was not made in a vacuum; neither were the cultural practices from surrounding island nations.

165 Koloa refers to Tongan treasures such as finely woven mats and *ngatu*.

166 Though disallowing cultural appropriation is integral, this should not stop Tongans from sharing experiences and knowledge with the islands nations with which Tongans share ancestry. Materially, many Samoans and Tongans have adopted the false colonial view that Moana tattooing was only practiced in Samoa and that Tongans need to "leave Samoan tattooing alone". All this ideology does is further the colonial agenda by stopping those of Moana-nui-a-Kiwa from revitalising and utilising their cultural koloa.

167 Such as in *tea o Māori*: Burgess and Painting, above n 151 at 208; and seen in *Native America: Matika Wilbur and Adrienne Keene "All My Relations – Decolonizing Sex"* (podcast, 19 March 2019) Spotify <www.spotify.com>.

168 Burgess and Painting, above n 151, at 210.

169 "Whakapapa" (2020) *Te Toki Waka Hourua* <www.tetokiwakahourua.org>.

170 As above.

Indigenous Futurisms: We move into the future while looking at our past

Knowing our past and centring relationality not only exposes colonial misconceptions for their falsity, but also provides a foundation for future movements into indigeneity.¹⁷¹ Relationality refers not only to relationships amongst fellow Tongans and Moana peoples, but also to the fostering of new connections with emerging technologies and artforms.¹⁷² This is seen through embracing new tātatau technologies and artists, incorporating intersectionality in our practices, and updating hygiene practices. We can be in relation with these new findings fluidly, like our ancestors, while also rejecting new developments that do not advance the decolonial project (such as the concepts of cultural gatekeeping, exclusivity, and body-shaming). Utilising indigenous knowledge will ensure that imposed colonialism is disentangled from our indigenous futures, and that creative Tongan engagement thrives.¹⁷³

VI CONCLUSION

Recommendations for Future Research

In many respects, this is a fledgling field of academic literature. Little writing is available in respect of Tongan tātatau, Tongan legal issues and theories, and Tongan colonial influence and post-colonialism. Therefore, it will be invaluable for more research to emerge in all of these areas.¹⁷⁴ Most importantly, developing a Moanan legal framework that is rooted in traditional Atua or anga fakatonga rather than colonial Christianity is essential. Any developments made in these areas should acknowledge the intersectional layers at play in Tongan society.

There is an essential gendered lens that has not been explored by this work, but which deserves attention. Acknowledging the status that Tongan women have both in the law and in wider Tongan society (and the ancillary powers and oppressions that creates) is vital.¹⁷⁵

171 Burgess and Painting, above n 151, at 228.

172 At 228.

173 At 228.

174 Not just in terms of academic writing, but also in terms of talanoa and the production of knowledge in ways that are more accessible to our Tongan communities.

175 For example, women have the ability to hold the position of Fahu if they are the eldest sister of a generation of siblings. A Fahu acts as the matriarch of a kāinga and presides over both formal and informal events for her brothers' children,

Delving into the lack of women's perspectives seen in historical accounts of Tonga and Tongan tātatau is integral to creating a nuanced, intersectional, and accurate understanding of our past, and therefore to reclamation in our indigenous futures.

Luva

In keeping with the Tongan values embedded in the Kakala methodology, it is essential that this research is available for Tongans. Although it will be contributing to the vast ocean of legal literature, the accumulation of knowledge in this article must be accessible to the Tongan community as a source of decolonial knowledge and a site of indigenous cultural reclamation. From here, the Kakala steps of malie and mafana are engaged. The information disseminated from this piece can prompt new talanoa and facilitate the formation of new relationships and the creation of new sites of knowledge that feed into the wider Tongan community. Mafana prompts us to make sustainable implementations of change; this may look like the integration of tātatau back into the Tongan community over many generations, or it may simply look like the re-emergence of tātatau as a topic of conversation within talanoa moving forward.

Moving into the Future with the Island in our Minds

I close this piece with an account of the interaction between Mau Piailug and Nainoa Thompson, two master way finders. These tufuga were part of the reinvigoration of vaka voyaging, of which the former acted as a mentor to the latter. In 1979, before an important voyage from Hawai'i to Tahiti, Mau asked his student: "Can you see the island?"¹⁷⁶ Tahiti was more than 4,000 kilometres away. Nainoa pondered and then answered: "I cannot see the island but I can see an image of the island in my mind".¹⁷⁷ "Good", replied Mau, "Don't ever lose that image or you will be lost".¹⁷⁸

This interaction reminds us that in order to achieve our goals we need to keep the island in our minds, *especially* when we may not be able to see it. As such, we need to keep the image of a decolonial Tonga, with tātatau as a contemporary site of cultural expression and

making important decisions for her kāinga. Although this is a seat of power within the family that Tongan women may hold, Tongan women are in the same breath oppressed by the legal system in not being able to own or inherit land.

176 Jeff Moag "Mau Piailug, One of the Last Wayfinders, Followed the Stars to Tahiti" (15 March 2019) Adventure Journal <www.adventure-journal.com>.

177 Moag, above n 176.

178 Moag, above n 176.

indigenous knowledge production in our minds, even if this future feels distant or unattainable. It is in holding these images in our mind's eye that we can continually work towards an indigenous future with relationality and indigenous knowledge sharing at the forefront, rather than colonial markers of legitimacy and success. For me, this work is a love letter to my Tongan ancestry and culture. The research I undertook, the relationships formed, the talanoa facilitated and the knowledge accumulated in making this a tangible reality were my way of keeping the island in my mind in working towards an indigenous future.

VII APPENDICES

Images of my father receiving his tātatau. These images were taken by various members of the family during our tātatau journey.



