

**Exploring the experiences of Tongan graduates in  
New Zealand today and the Quarter Life Crisis**

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***“MY JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN”***

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## Abstract

After completing a Bachelor's degree, I had little success in finding a job which matched my field of study. I thought this situation was unique to me until I found that quite a few of my Tongan and other Pacific graduate friends were in the same boat. I also found that in line with global trends, while the number of university graduates was increasing in New Zealand, so too were the numbers of graduates who were unemployed. Furthermore that a significant number of these were Pacific. Clearly, after a number of years of study, this is a disastrous situation for these graduates and for national development. While national numbers data was available there was no research about the personal experiences of Pacific graduates after graduation.

This was the genesis of my study. Being Tongan, I decided to focus this exploratory study on the immediate post-graduation experiences of Tongan graduates, an ethnic minority group within the New Zealand population. Their views on what could be done to facilitate their transition into the workforce and then, whether and how their experiences matched those proposed in the global concept of the Quarter Life Crisis (QLC) as proposed by Robbin and Wilner (2001). I wanted to see whether being Tongan, and the *anga faka-Tonga*, impacted on their experiences. For example as is well documented there is a prominence given to education as a way of contributing back to the family and community and also as a major status raising activity in the Tongan monarchical society.

I decided on a qualitative research approach, using the phenomenological design as seen in the Pacific research framework of *Talanoa* (Vaioloti, 2006). Individual interviews (*talanoa*) were carried out with 12 recent Tongan graduates from three universities: AUT, Auckland and Waikato. Participants comprised an equal mix by gender, and while numbers born in New Zealand and in the homeland Tonga varied they however all were mainly educated in New Zealand.

Findings were that for almost this entire group the post-graduation experience had been a difficult journey especially as views showed that they had little idea about the realities of the workforce. Most, had assumed that they would 'walk straight into a job' once they got their degree. Three participants walked straight into a job which they had lined up when they were studying and were still there and developing professionally. Some discussed how they had gone for 40 jobs and rather than be unemployed had taken 'any job'. The risk factor there, was that they had stayed in

these jobs rather than try for higher level posts because of the risk of being unemployed again. This is a waste of human resources and potential. Another finding was that the family systems were a double edged sword, both ensuring their basic needs were met but also adding pressures when they had not been able to contribute financially to the family's basic needs and cultural obligations such as to *fua kavenga* (carrying out obligations and responsibilities). Coming back into the family after being a student brought added pressures as well. Their inability to find a job also meant that their ego took a knock in that they would be perceived to be 'like the uneducated' other. Measures to address the transition included university courses having a practical component (internship), course selection and the need for networking systems to teach knowledge of workforce practices and job practice. With respect to whether Tongan students 'suffered from the quarter life crisis' the answer was yes in some ways but no in others. Adulthood was not an age specific concept in Tongan society and this realisation was not an individual goal but was expressed in terms of family achievement.

Suggestions for further research areas include whether the Tongan graduates' ethnicity or English language competency influences their employment search?; Are Tongan (and Pacific) graduates 'settling into any job' after graduation and if so, what are the personal, community and national implications of this? And lastly how are Pacific university students making career choices and what factors influence these?

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## List of Abbreviations

AUT	Auckland University of Technology
AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BBus	Bachelor of Business
BCom	Bachelor of Commerce
BCS	Bachelor of Communication Studies
BHSc	Bachelor of Health of Science
BSocSci	Bachelor of Social Science
CEDAW	Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Right of the Child
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunities
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Hons	Honours
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
ISSR	Institute of Social Science Research
LDS	Church of Latter Day Saints (aka Mormon Church)
LLB	Bachelor of Law
MIRAB	Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy
MLaw	Masters in Law
MPH	Masters of Public Health
MPIA	Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs
MPP	Masters in Public Policy
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NZ	New Zealand
OE	Overseas Experience
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDS	Public Defence Services
PG dip	Post-Graduate diploma

PG dip teach	Post-Graduate diploma in Teaching
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QLC	Quarter Life Crisis
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEO	Tertiary Education Organisation
TES	Tertiary Education Strategy
Uni	University
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USP	University of South Pacific

## Glossary

The following terms are defined with the help of the Tongan dictionary (Churchward, 1959) and various other writings from Tongan scholars.

<i>Ako</i>	School/ schooling or education
<i>Anga faka-Tonga</i>	Tongan culture, Tongan way of life
<i>‘Aonga ‘o ‘eku ako</i>	Make the most of my schooling/ education
<i>‘Ātakai</i>	Environment/ social setting
<i>‘Atamai</i>	Mind
<i>Fa’alavelave</i>	Refers to the Tongan term <i>fua kavenga</i> (see below) in the Samoan language
<i>Faikava</i>	To prepare and drink kava together with due form or ceremony
<i>Failotu</i>	To run a liturgy service or is a liturgy service
<i>Fakalakalaka</i>	To progress/ develop
<i>Fāmili</i>	Family
<i>Fatongia</i>	Obligation/ responsibility/ duty
<i>Fetokoni’aki</i>	To help one another/ to co-operate
<i>Fua kavenga</i>	Carrying out obligation and responsibilities
<i>Fonua</i>	Land or people of the land
<i>Ha’a</i>	Descendant group
<i>Hou’eiki</i>	Noble/ chiefs or of royal lineage
<i>‘Ilo</i>	Know or have knowledge
<i>Kāinga</i>	Kin group
<i>Kakai</i>	People
<i>Laumalie</i>	Spiritual or soul
<i>Māfana</i>	Warmth or heart-felt
<i>Mo’ui fakapotopoto</i>	sustainable living
<i>‘Ofa</i>	To love, to care

<i>Pālangi</i>	Caucasian person or generally, a term to define the ‘western way’
<i>Poto</i>	To have skills and at times can be used to describe someone ‘clever’ or educated.
<i>Sino</i>	Body
<i>Tā</i>	Form or establish
<i>Taki potungāue talavou</i>	Youth leader
<i>Talanoa</i>	Method of enquiry or to talk
<i>Tu’i Tonga</i>	Tongan king
<i>Vale</i>	Ignorant or unskilled person
<i>Vā</i>	Distance between, distance apart; relationships, towards each other
<i>Vahefonua Tonga ‘o Aotearoa</i>	Tongan Synod in the New Zealand Methodist Church

## Dedication

**To my parents Tu'uhoko-ki-Langi (Viliani Pole Tu'uhoko) & Makeleta Lute Pole Tu'uhoko.**

*'Oku 'ikai ha lea fe'unga ke fakahā atu 'a 'emau hounga'ia he ngaahi tō kakava mo e mo'ui kalusefai ne mo fai ke lava ai 'emau akó. Ko ho'omo kaveinga'aki 'a e Akó mo e Lotú kuo hoko ia ko e pununga faingamālie kiate kimautolu kotoa pē, 'a ho'omo fānau. Pea ko ia ai 'oku mau koloa'ia ke fakamālō atu ki he kātaki moe 'aufuatō kuo mo fuesia, 'a ia he'ikai toe ngalo ia 'i homau lotó mo 'emau mo'ui foki.*

**My dearest brother Kalafitoni Pole Jnr**

*Neongo kuo ke folau hola meiate kimautolu ka 'oku mau kei manatu melie mo 'ofa atu pē ki ho fofonga 'ofá pea mo ho'o mateaki'i mo fusi 'a e ama takiloa 'i hotau ki'i lotofale masivá kaeuma'ā 'a e makamaile ne fakatoka 'i Ha'atu'ukau; ke mau ako pea fakaa'u 'e he lotú.*

**May you continue to rest in God's love.**



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First and foremost, all praise and glory is given to our Heavenly Father for His guidance and love during this educational journey. There were many challenges which tested my faith but His love and mercy continues to be my strength and fortress.

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'Ofa lahi atu mo e lotu

Sela Tu'uhoko Pole

### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), no material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or any other institution of higher learning.

Signed.....

Date.....

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

When I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA Hons) I thought I would walk straight into a job that matched my degree qualification, after all this was the message I had always gotten from my teachers, parents and Tongan community leaders- get your degree and you will get a good job. Although the fact of the number of Tonga's growing doctorate (PhD) graduates was generally known, there was less talk about employment attainment. However this did not happen for me.

Despite applying for many jobs, I was not able to get one. Along with my dwindling independence and savings I realised that the prospect of finding my dream job was becoming less of a reality. During my time of study, my parents had not really talked about this. In fact there had been a great deal of celebration of the fact that I had passed my study. I had gotten the 'piece of paper' and getting a job did not seem such a significant point in their view.

At the time I had also just moved back home after years of independence living in student accommodation. I was grappling with the idea of re-defining my place within the family and family home as well as my cultural duties as a young Tongan woman, albeit one with an honours degree. To me, the excitement of getting this degree was slowly fading as I realised the likelihood that my parents would be supporting me for some time to come. So I began looking for any job even if this did not reflect my degree title, so that I could earn cash to contribute to the household. During this time I had never felt so alone. In addition I thought my experiences were an isolated case unique to me and my individual transition back home after completing my study.

Then I saw a New Zealand channel one broadcasting television show *Close Up*, which furthermore reported that 1600 more graduates were out of work in New Zealand than in the year 2011 (Sainsbury, 2012), that while universities were graduating more students, the unemployment rate for people under the age of 25 was growing (Statistics New Zealand, 2013a) as was national debt for student loans.

A number of factors caught my attention. First, the numbers and in fact, that graduates could not get jobs. Up until then, most data had shown that it was people (and Pacific peoples) in the unskilled category that were out of work. Second, that despite these levels of unemployment, the government continued to invest heavily in tertiary education including the availability of student loans (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Although there had been a decrease in the number of people borrowing student loans, the average amount had increased by 2.5% (Statistics New Zealand, 2013b). This is an increase of \$13,600,000 in 2013 from \$593,000,000 million in the year 2012 (Education Counts, 2013a). I came to the conclusion that global literature sees participation in tertiary education as the key to national development, to addressing issues in human development and to achieving their economic goals (OECD, 2013; United Nations, 2013a).

### National goals

The Tertiary Education Strategy that is released by government which outlines the goals and expectations it has for the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). Their responsibilities not only include the distribution of 3 billion dollars annually to each Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) but also to facilitate and ensure national development goals are being fulfilled (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

The Tertiary Education Strategy (2010-2015) outlines government goals and aims for improving the outcomes for tertiary institutions within New Zealand and included an increase in the budget to four billion (Ministry of Education, 2010). The strategy plans to increase the participation of people, specifically that of young people under the age of 25, to a level higher than that of a level 4 qualification (Bachelor degree). Second, to increase funding for engineering and science programmes in 2014, because these subjects would be economically beneficial, and make way for professionals to perform at an international level (Ministry of Education, 2013b, 2013a). Although the strategy is in its drafting stage, these aims align with the global increases in the subject choices considered 'hot' for global markets, which are predominantly the science subjects (Altbach, 2013, p. 67). The Tertiary Education Strategy and other reports indicated to me that

tertiary education was seen to be a major national issue, which would contribute to national economic productivity and achievement.

The latest available statistics showed that New Zealand universities are producing more graduates than ever across a wide range of curriculum areas (Education Counts, 2014a). Furthermore, that 50% of young women are more likely to attain a tertiary degree and men are 50% less likely to get a tertiary degree, resulting in a 10% point of difference between female and male graduates (OECD, 2013). Tertiary attainment in New Zealand has increased for graduates between the ages of 25 and 64 at a rate of 2.9% since the year 2000. The government's objectives are to not only increase the number of people entering universities but also the trades, skills and specialisation of jobs in engineering and science (Ministry of Education, 2013b). Budget equity funding for universities to promote the participation of Pacific and Maori students, through grants and scholarships has also increased (Ministry of Education, 2013a).

### **The Graduate Experiences**

In reviewing the literature and national data it was evident that no-one had approached students to ask about their experiences and thoughts on their post graduate transitions. I started to talk about my post-graduation experiences with other Pacific graduates and particularly with my Tongan post-graduate friends. I found that I was not the only one in this situation. Other Tongan and Pacific friends of mine were experiencing similar feelings of frustration, failure and a sense of hopelessness - that, after years of schooling we were not achieving the next expectation of getting a job. Many had considered this to be a sign of failure because they were not fulfilling the purpose of why their parents had migrated to New Zealand. Many were anxious to fulfil this unspoken expectation. Not getting a job was something that was seldom discussed amongst graduates because it was perceived as a failure when a university graduate was unemployed. At the same time, getting a degree brought a certain level of status and an expectation of cultural and religious responsibilities. Not having a job merely intensified feelings of anxiety.

Although the graduates I talked with had different levels of qualification, from undergraduate and post graduate study, they all experienced the same challenges after graduation, finding work and

adjusting to the next phase of adult life. Even though all had received degrees from different New Zealand universities and their places of birth varied (some were New Zealand-born Tongans and Tongan born Tongans) and were male or female, there was a remarkable similarity in their feelings of their disillusioned experiences.

### **Human Development Theory and the Quarter Life Crisis**

As noted, discussion about graduate experiences have looked at the social effects and the impacts it has on the family. However, there has been little research on their personal graduate experiences or on how they felt during their transition. As I started to examine this situation within a wider global context, I found the work of human developmental theorists such as Erikson very useful as the starting point for exploring the post graduate experience. Building on Havighurst's developmental tasks (1956), Erikson (1968) proposed a set of four stages of development as infancy, childhood, adolescence and then young adulthood. Erikson's stages are age defined and based on concepts of individual stages, each of which was their own task. For example teenage years were a time of identity formation and adulthood was tied with adult markers such as getting a job, having a family and owning a home.

As has been well critiqued, the developmental model proposed at a time when secondary schooling was the highest level of education for many and only a very small number went on to tertiary study (Erikson, 1968). As noted by Arnett (2004) in earlier years, the completion of secondary education at the age of 17 to 18 signified the end of adolescence and the beginning of adult life. Clearly, in an ever changing world the theories and benchmarks on which traditional developmental theories were based may no longer be relevant (Arnett, 2000; Atwood & Scholtz, 2008). Arnett (2000) developed the concept of emerging adulthood to explain the life events and markers which might best match the 'end of formal schooling' or the post graduate experience of today. Building on Arnett (2000), Robbin and Wilner (2001) coined the phrase 'Quarter Life Crisis' to capture the 'developmental tasks' of this time.

The QLC is described as the time between completing education (graduation) and getting a job i.e employment, which is seen to signal adulthood (Fadjukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2007; Fouad

& Bynner, 2008; Nelson & Barry, 2005) . As I read the QLC literature, I became interested in examining the applicability of the concept of QLC to Tongan students in New Zealand, who, as is well reported, come from a very specific social, economic, spiritual and cultural context as expressed in the *anga faka-Tonga* (the Tongan ways).

On the one hand the QLC resonates well with my own experience of not being able to get a job and having to readjust and redefine my role as a 'daughter' when I completed my degrees. Some of the changes included giving up some of my independence from my years living away from home and coming back to live under the roof and rules of my parents, I questioned was the Tongan experience the same as that outlined in the global model?

This got me thinking of how my own Tongan social, cultural and gender roles might impact on the nature of any QLC. My Tongan identity was important to me. As with other Tongan graduates I also believed that my role was to return home to fulfil my obligation *ke 'aonga 'eku akó* (utilising my education) (Koloto, 2004). Furthermore, my belief was that the knowledge that I had received in education was not mine to keep but was bestowed upon me by God to benefit those around me. However, as much as I respected these Tongan values and beliefs, the reality of losing my independence by returning home was shattering to me. I began to see a difference between the *anga faka-Tonga* and the values and beliefs I had been exposed to during my tertiary study particularly, and I wondered if other Tongan students felt the same.

### **The Research gap**

I set these ideas of why and what was the value of tertiary education today against my experiences as a female Tongan graduate. In my view, a strong relationship has developed between education, the economy and social participation in New Zealand's rapidly changing society. In addition, educational policies and practices are giving priority to increasing the number of graduates from minority groups such as Tongans. However, while Pacific numbers of post graduates are increasing, how are Pacific succeeding in using these degrees? While in past times and places, just getting a degree was sufficient contribution to the family status, this may not be the same for Tongan graduates in New Zealand's increasingly monetized economy. Today my

question then became: what is the Tongan post graduate experience and what can be done to bridge their transition out of formal schooling into work? I decided to frame my research as a two part enquiry: first, to explore the experiences of Tongan post graduates and second to critique and set these experiences against the QLC global model.

### **Research focus**

My research explores the post graduate experiences of Tongan graduates, more specially, how they perceive their graduate experiences, how they transition into the workforce, and whether have been influenced by culture, including gendered roles and the expectations of their *fāmili* (family) and *kāinga* (kinship group). This focus is vital, given the relationship between employment and economic and social participation in New Zealand today. In addition, as the numbers of Pacific island tertiary students continue to increase at an average of 4.1% a year and given the on-going high valuing of education by Pacific islanders and Tongans (Ministry of Education, 2013c) the importance of this study became more evident.

### **Research questions**

This study explores Tongan post graduate experiences with the aim of identifying strategies that may ensure the smooth transitions of Pacific graduates out of tertiary studies. This is a pilot study.

Questions are:

1. What are Tongan graduate experiences after graduation?
2. How can a smooth graduate transition into the work force be achieved?
3. How do the experiences of Tongan graduates align with the Quarter life crisis?

My research is qualitative; and gives a voice to these post-graduates. While statistics have shown an increase in unemployment amongst tertiary graduates, my research will capture post graduate students and lived experiences. Individual in-depth interviews using the *talanoa* will be carried out given the sensitive nature of this research (Vaiotei, 2006). There are many different types of *talanoa* that can be used for different purposes for different levels of conversation (Vaiotei, 2013). For this study, *the talanoa* will comprise two types of conversation. For the first two questions,

participants will be reflecting on their own experiences. However the third question will involve a synthesis and analysis of their experiences against the QLC concept. This will be further explored in Chapter Three.

### **Outline of thesis by chapter**

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. This chapter has presented an outline of the thesis aims. The contents of the remaining six chapters is as follows:

**Chapter Two** presents the literature review for the study. Drawing on global literature, four sections are explored in relation to the graduate experiences.

**Chapter Three** presents statistical as well as social information from the homeland Tonga and New Zealand to set the context and cultural ideologies that influence the world view of the Tongan graduate experiences.

**Chapter Four** will discuss the research design and the methodology namely phenomenology and the *talanoa*. The two different kinds of *talanoa* used to address the research question are outlined here as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.

**Chapter Five** will present the findings from the *talanoa* in relation to the three research questions including the recurring themes from the participants' stories.

**Chapter Six** will discuss the findings from the participant stories in relation to the literature and the research questions.

**Chapter Seven** the research conclusions and limitations are presented along with recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

A main finding of my review of the literature was that while there was a significant amount of data reporting Pacific people's access to retention and completion of tertiary study, there was little on students' actual post-graduation experiences including their transition into the workforce. This confirmed the exploratory nature of the study. So this literature review focus is more on what factors might impact on the post-graduation experiences of Tongan graduates and how they were able to use their degree.

Four major fields were reviewed for this study. First, literature on the views about the purposes and goals of tertiary education was explored. The overarching question here was: 'how do Tongans value, and what are their expectations of, tertiary education?' which is also discussed more in depth in Chapter Three. Second is a review of the graduate situation, including employment and unemployment. This section will draw on global and New Zealand literature. Third, data about the place and value of work is presented. Finally this chapter concludes with a discussion of the global concept of the Quarter Life Crisis (QLC). In this ages and stages model, the QLC is defined as the stage between ending education and entering adulthood. The question here is whether and how the post graduate experiences of Tongan graduates align with the concept of QLC.

#### **Purposes and goals of Tertiary Education**

Two inter-related factors regarding the purposes and goals of tertiary education are seen in this literature. The first is a shift and broadening in views about the aims and purposes of tertiary education, which is reflected in the way tertiary education curriculums have responded to factors such as national and global influences including human rights and equity issues, and the impact of rapid advances in technology on ideas of what is knowledge and how this is shared (Gegeo & Gegeo, 2001). Second, are issues relating to access to education. Whereas in the past people's aspirations were for primary and some secondary schooling, today it has become the expectation that most secondary school leavers will enter a tertiary institution of some kind. In addition, as the

period of formal schooling has extended (Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995) people are staying in a formal education system for much longer periods today, which impacts significantly on their entry into the workforce and, as proposed in human development ages and stages theory, their achieving of adulthood.

With regard to curriculum, in earlier times university study was the preserve of the elite or those destined to be the future leaders of society. Only a small number had the privilege of entering university (Altbach, 2013; Trow, 1976; Wolf, 2002). A 'university' man was described by Newman 1853 (as cited in Bennett, Dunne & Carre, 2000, p. 3) as someone who was able to think subjectively, have cognitive skills to think clearly, analyse and communicate ideas effectively. Over time, higher education objectives expanded to include utilitarian instruction skills aimed at producing morally thinking and working citizens (Anderson, 2010). Curriculums evolved to include not only the so called topics of the elite such as philosophy and the arts but also skills that could be used for employment (Trow, 1976).

The next mega shift in educational aims was the response to the technological evolution, where university curriculums began emphasising the need for highly skilled workers (Esnault, 1992). The rapidly changing technology changed the lives of people all around the world and also altered the way people worked e.g. technology replaced human services and in doing so challenged the relevance of the skills and knowledge that had been traditionally taught in education (Spitz-Oener, 2006). In addition, education came to be viewed as a priority in terms of national manpower or human resources planning.

Globally, and in New Zealand, governments began directing funding to engineering and science fields because these areas of specialty were recognised internationally as contributing to the global pool of knowledge or the knowledge economy (Ministry of Education, 2013a). In addition, the numbers of graduates in the sciences especially became an indicator of national development (United Nations, 2008, 2013b). This move also aligned with global reports that skills taught should be those which are adaptable within the job market and that the higher the education, the broader the work options for individuals (OECD, 2013; UNESCO, 2013; Whitehead, 1977).

A different challenge to educational aims was set by the human rights mandates of the post war period. For example, Gender equity challenges such as the Convention of Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in the 1980s and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Whereas in the years of the Industrial Revolution formal schooling has been viewed as a way of socialising the masses and preparing them for the workforce, access to universal primary, secondary and tertiary study was now argued as a right (UNESCO, 2013). In New Zealand the principles of equity and justice have led to affirmative actions for Maori and Pacific students, especially towards science subjects where numbers continue to be low (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Proactive measures to ensure gender equity so as to empower women as the future mothers and teach the knowledge that can potentially save family lives have also been put in place (UNESCO, 2013).

Today, it has become a widely held expectation that all students progress through to some kind of tertiary study when their secondary schooling is completed. This expectation is shared by national planners, teachers, community members, parents and students. It is seen for example in the scaffolding and alignment of secondary school curriculums to university entry pre-requisites, and the availability of government scholarships and student loans to encourage a progression to further study. This is a vast change from the past, when tertiary education was something that few considered entering after high school, when the small group who transitioned into tertiary study were those who could afford the fees (Altbach 2013).

The role of the university has also been questioned, with some arguing the need for universities to skill workers (Esnault, 1992) and others arguing that tertiary institutions have been so enthralled in creating knowledge that they have been focused on understanding the changing world, hence leading to an overproduction of graduates in certain fields (Hartley, 1995; Murphy, 1993; Watts, 1974). However, with the recent weakening of the global market countries are turning their attention to tertiary education and its potential economic and social role.

Today tertiary education has been identified as the best way of keeping up with technological developments, increasing understanding of these changes (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Esnault, 1992; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) and ensuring peoples' place and entry into the workforce.

Advances in technology have led to more complex roles and the restructuring of work roles to accommodate these changes (Bennett et al., 2000).

Although researchers propose that the relationship between educational expansion and economic prosperity remains elusive (Murphy, 1993; Wolf, 2002), at the philosophical level the understanding continues to be that education is a source of social improvement for economic, global and human development (International Labour Organisation, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2013b, 2013c; Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010; OECD, 2013; United Nations, 2013a, 2013b). Not so well documented or understood is the impact of work and career decisions on individuals and individual development (Arnett, 2010). That is, while young people are entering educational institutions and seeing these as training grounds for their participation in the job market (Kintzer, 1990) the jobs they get also play a significant part in their socialisation and their social and economic participation (Arnett, 2010).

### *Tongan perceptions of the value of education*

Anecdotal reports suggest a shift in perceptions of the valuing of education has taken place in New Zealand's Tongan community today as a response to increased aspirations. That the Tongan community has embraced wholeheartedly the importance of formal education is seen in Tonga's reputation as the nation with the highest number of PhD's per capita (Government of Western Australia, 2011). But, how is education valued and shown? Recent Tongan writings have been revisiting the traditional meaning of education. Thaman (2008) and Māhina (2008) highlighted the concept of *'ilo* (knowledge), *poto* (skill) and *ako* (education). Thaman (2008) discusses the importance of acknowledging cultural diversity for Pacific students, since the nature of learning is holistic and education for Tongans is not individualistic. Success therefore needs to be validated through the group as "Tonga is still largely dependent on social rather than individual considerations" (p. 467). Māhina (2008) like Thaman also explores the meaning of education and the socialisation that happens when shifting from being *vale* (ignorant) to gaining *'ilo* (knowledge) and *poto* (skill) through the use of *ako* (education).

Māhina's writing, which combines work from various Pacific academic educators such as Helu, (1999); Halapua, (2003); Helu-Thaman, (2002), Vaiioleti, (2003); Prescott, (2008) and others, emphasises Pacific education.

In the concept of *'ilo, poto* and *ako*, the mark of an educated person is someone who is committed to using the knowledge and skills gained through education to ensure the good of the family, community and society. In this paradigm, education is a collective not an individual benefit. This fits the Tongan family system where priority is given to the family good. Does this ideal which had relevance to a particular time and place (context) hold true for Tongan families and graduates in New Zealand today? Or, has 'education for employment' become the major purpose and motivation for Tongan students entering tertiary study? For this study, it is likely that cultural ideals will influence expectations and decisions made during the post graduate period.

## **Graduates, Employment and Unemployment**

### *Graduates*

The tertiary graduate population is increasing (OECD, 2013). Undergraduate and post graduate completions have increased by 10% across OECD countries in the past decade, with a 7% increase amongst young adults between the ages of 25-34 years. Differences by gender are also noted. For example, in 2000 the number of male graduates outnumbered females. Ten years later (2011) female graduate numbers had exceeded males and made up 33% of tertiary attainment compared to 30% of males (OECD, 2013). In countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Ireland female tertiary graduates outnumber the proportion of either men or women in any other level of education. In addition, young women are 84% more likely to attain an upper secondary and tertiary education than young males (OECD, 2013).

In line with global trends, the number of graduates in New Zealand has also increased. For example, the AUT graduation numbers to graduate at one time has set a record in the 2013 December graduation with 4180 students receiving qualification (AUT, 2013). Recent data to date indicates that approximately 53.8% aged between 25-34 held a qualification higher than a level 4 (Education Counts, 2014b). In the latest New Zealand tertiary data the overall enrolments for

tertiary education decreased by 0.2% in 2013. However, despite this number, people in the 18-19 age group continue to grow every year at a noticeable rate of 4% since 2006 (Education Counts, 2014c). Although there was a slight decrease in enrolment in 2012 and 2013, tertiary qualification enrolments for a level four (bachelor level) and higher had not only increased but have continued to grow for young people between the ages of 18-24 years (Education Counts, 2014a) which is in the focus age group of this study.

Pacific completion rates have also been increasing over the last ten years. In 2012 the number of students completing a qualification had increased from 11,340 in 2011 to 12,207, as well as the number of qualifications completed (from 12,928 in 2011 to 14,348) (Education Counts, 2013b). Specifically for Tongan students the increase was from 2,045 in 2011 to 2,206, as well as an increase in the number of qualifications completed from 2,346 in 2011 to 2,550 in 2012 (Education Counts, 2013a). Despite these numbers and the increasing number of participation, Pacific people are half as likely to hold a bachelor's degree like that of the general population (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010).

Although Pacific outcomes are increasing they are still lower than the national average. However needless to say the enrolment for Pacific students in New Zealand universities continue to increase (Ministry of Education, 2013c; Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010; Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010). Furthermore, despite the predictions that national numbers of tertiary enrolments will fall, indications are Pacific ethnic groups will continue to grow (Ministry of Education, 2013c). In 2012, 33,800 Pacific full time and part time students were enrolled into any formal Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO), an increase from 33,111 in 2011. Pasifika enrolments also have increased for University and Polytechnic institutions<sup>1</sup> with Bachelor degrees having the highest increase in any qualification by 7.7% (Education Counts 2013b). Students in all TEO between the ages of 18-19 increased by 4.3% as well as for 20-24

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<sup>1</sup> University enrolments increased from 9,567 in 2011 to 9,918 and Polytechnic enrolments from 12,453 in 2011 to 13,101 in 2012.

year olds by 5.8%. For students between 25-39 years old numbers decreased by 0.7% in the year 2012 (Education Counts, 2013b)<sup>2</sup>.

The Education at a Glance OECD (2013) report, showed that general studies (known as type A theory based qualifications) and vocational areas of study (also known as type B skills qualification) had increased by 20% in OECD countries in the past 16 years. However, in New Zealand, this was an increase of over 50% - not only in enrolments but in achievements, which is significant. Numbers in the Vocational training of trade skills (Type B) remained steady.

The 2014 Education Counts data had shown that despite the fluctuation of enrolment numbers in New Zealand it remains steady, where majority of tertiary enrolments were in the bachelors' level, then diploma and certificate level 4 (Education Counts, 2014c)<sup>3</sup>. Since 2006 the highest number of enrolments continue to be courses in society and culture, management and commerce courses and natural and physical science<sup>4</sup> (Education Counts, 2014d).

For Pacific students, the highest participation by field of study in all tertiary establishments was in the 'Other fields of study' category at 41,048 (part-time and full-time), followed by Business Management with 5,846 and Office studies at 4,479 (Education Counts, 2013b). These figures do not indicate whether courses were selected by career goals, as was emphasised in the MPIA Careers Pathways Report (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010). However, Athanasou and Torrance (2002) noted that career choices for Pacific islanders are, in most cases, chosen with an eye to their ability to increase economic and social standing. Aspects of course selection will be explored in my research. By gender, Pasifika male enrolments increased by 2.9% in 2012, which was higher than the increase of female enrolments at 1.5%, even though the overall enrolments for females were 19,948 and males 13,852 (Education Counts, 2013b). For Tongan students, female enrolments in 2012 increased by 3.7% from 3,460 in 2011 to 3,587 in 2012 while

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<sup>2</sup> 18-19 year olds increased from 6,508 in 2011 to 6,785 in 2012, 20-24 year olds increased from 9,273 in 2011 to 9,814 in 2012, 25-34 year olds decreased from 10,041 in 2011 to 9,971 in 2012 (Education counts, 2013a).

<sup>3</sup> 147,000 enrolled into bachelor level qualification, diploma at 63,7000 and certificate level 4 at 63,4000 in the year 2013 (Education counts, 2014c).

<sup>4</sup> Society & Culture at 75,000, Management & Commerce at 45,000 and Natural & Physical Science at 37,000 (Education counts, 2014c).

male enrolments decreased by 0.8% from 2,503 in 2011 to 2,482 in 2012 (Education Counts, 2013a).

### *Employment*

The latest March 2014 household labour force survey showed an increase in employed people in New Zealand with a 2.6% increase in jobs filled from the last quarter in 2013 (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). With businesses increasingly filling in this labour demand, four main industries were identified as contributing to the increase in filled jobs, these were the health care and social assistance; retail trade; transport, postal and warehousing; and construction (Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

As noted, TV 1's *Close up* report (2012) brought attention to the issue of graduate unemployment. Pacific people make up a significant number of the gradual growth of unemployment statistics in New Zealand, following that of Maori (Statistics New Zealand, 2013c). Although there seems to be little national data on the relationship between tertiary graduation and employment transition into work and graduate experiences, a study was done by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (2010) and the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (2011). It concluded that Pacific students are finding it difficult to transition into skilled jobs in advanced trades, technical and professional employment as they are significantly underrepresented in these fields.

Howie (2012) and Bell (2012) noted that it is becoming a hard reality for many of the unemployed graduates looking for work. Findings from a Graduate Longitudinal Study New Zealand (GLSNZ) study by Otago University suggested that while students were not selecting their fields of study according to a job and earning priority they nevertheless had let it be known that they rated pursuing a career very highly (Graduate Longitudinal Study New Zealand, 2012). The GLSNZ study had found that 8700 graduates from eight universities identified three main reasons why they chose their field of study: 1.) 77.1% said mainly for interest; 2.) 71.4% had said they wanted to pursue a career, and 3.) 34.5% wanted to increase their earning potential (Graduate Longitudinal Study New Zealand, 2012). This is reflected in the government house report released in October 2013 that indeed those who did receive a bachelor level qualification were 48% more

likely to find work opportunities increasing with each level of qualification (Joyce, 2013a). The Minister of Skills and Employment had commented that the report's data should therefore be used by students and their families as guidance to which subjects to study in university in relation to the salaries that could be earned after graduation (Joyce, 2013a).

Of high significance, an Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust report (2011) identified the value of incorporating cultural factors into work place management so as to help heighten the engagement of young Pacific workers within the workforce. A report by MPIA (2010) had advised young people that it all comes down to 'acting strategically' when making career choices. That it is not just making an early decision to study: it is focusing on learning a broad range of skills that can be adapted to many occupational roles after studies. Views are that was most likely to bridge transition from schooling into the work force (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2011).

### *Unemployment*

Unemployment rates across the world are high for both unskilled and skilled workers of all ages (United Nations, 2013a) indicating that the impacts of the global financial crisis on policy, trade and employment issues has caused problems for the highly qualified as well as the less well qualified. Noted also in contrast with earlier years, today a significant number of graduates are amongst the unemployed. As is well reported, the increase in graduates has not been matched by the number of work places available (International Labour Organisation, 2013). During and after the global economic crisis, a four million increase in unemployment was noted (totalling to 179 million people). The International Labour Organisation (2013) predicted that by the end of 2013 the unemployment increase would reach 5 million, resulting in over 202 million unemployed globally and a 3 million increase in 2014.

The 2013 World Development Report highlighted the global challenges countries are experiencing with the shortage of employment. Factors noted included "flawed financial markets, a lack of assets, a skewed distribution of land and other forms of wealth, poor infrastructure and problematic trade policies" (Heintz, 2013, p. 799). The United Nations (2013c) midyear report stated that the "main priority for policy makers worldwide should therefore be to support a robust

and balanced global recovery, with a focus on promoting job creation” (p. III). The 2013 Global Employment Trend Report by the International Labour Organisation (2013) noted the influence of factors such as a skills mismatch between education and actual workforce skills in employment available in relation to the population ratio and the continuation of jobs being lost due the financial crisis. Youth unemployment was also signalled as an issue of urgency.

Noted also is that technological changes have seen a decrease in labouring posts and the increase in computerised and machinery work (Levy & Murnane, 2004). This replacing of people by machines has decreased the numbers needed for labouring work. In sum, it is argued that the jobs students had prepared for whilst in tertiary education have been replaced by computerised machinery (Levy & Murnane, 2004). This has increased the competition between graduates for the available employment and has also set them against the group of experienced people already in the workforce (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003). In sum, the job market has become a place where graduates with little practical or workforce experience pit their knowledge and skills against those in the workforce already (Rynes, Orlitzky & Bretz Jr, 1997).

As early as 1993, Murphy (1993) noted that the expenditure on higher education in Britain was higher than the returns in investment and labour in the economy. Wolf (2002) commented that the focus on tertiary education and the push to get everyone educated may have become a gateway to adulthood but this was not doing the economy any good. In New Zealand, the expenditure and debt on tertiary education led to changes in the 2013 student loan scheme. Despite the increase in filled jobs in New Zealand over the last March quarter of 2014, the unemployment rate remained unchanged from the last quarter at 6.0% with 147,000 people still unemployed (Statistics New Zealand, 2014b). As noted, unemployment amongst Pacific people in New Zealand is especially high. While Pasifika comprise 7.4% of the total population, they represented 15.8% of the overall unemployed population, followed by the Maori population at 14.1% (Statistics New Zealand, 2013c).

## **The Value of Work**

Most often 'work' or waged employment is associated with financial returns and as a form of social protection (Whitehead, 1977). However, having a job also plays a major role in identity formation (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Fouad & Bynner, 2008) and finding employment and being associated with an occupation has been taken as a marker of adulthood (Fadjukoff et al., 2007). In sum, employment is associated with quality of life, as an indication that people can support themselves and that they are no longer reliant on their parents or others for financial support. Research about the importance of work is seen in the disgruntled experiences of graduates when experiencing the reality of the competitiveness of the work place (Sainsbury, 2012).

### *Pacific*

The importance of work for Pacific peoples is deeply embedded in every migration story (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi, 2003). Each outlines the search for a better life and the importance of education in this process. In New Zealand's cash economy, work is now associated with the need for cash by which to fulfil duties to the family. As noted in Section 1, the expectation has become that those who have had the privilege of having a higher education use their knowledge and skills to ensure the wellbeing of their families. Addo (2012) notes that "money is a key valuable ensuring that families can continue to perform according to cultural values" (p.11).

For Pacific families employment endows the ability to fulfil cultural obligations and responsibilities to extended family members in New Zealand and to send money to their homelands (as remittances) to help family members. Cowling (2002) describes monetary donations as the ultimate level of 'ofa in the Tongan systems. Koloto and Sharma (2005) found that Tongan women said employment meant they could contribute financially and fulfil their responsibilities to their family, church and community in New Zealand and the homelands.

In a study by Strachan, Samuel and Takaro (2007), female graduates from Vanuatu described their inability to use their tertiary qualifications to get employment 'so they can support their families' as devastating. As noted also 'successful work life for Pacific islanders is the ability to

balance all aspects important to family and community' (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2011).

Although there is little research on the cultural significance of waged work for families in the homelands, Johansson-Fua, Manu, Takapautolo, and Taufe'ulungaki (2007) note that work plays an important part in achieving sustainability in Tonga. Furthermore monetary contributions maintain and nurture the relationship between those who give as well as those who receive (Johansson-Fua et al., 2007). Cowling (2002) describes work as the ability to earn benefits not only for the individual but the family. As employment is a source of social protection for members of society, its function is not only financial; being able to hold a job is a source of social wellbeing (Heintz, 2013).

### *Migrant experiences*

Global data also confirms that getting work is a priority for migrants. People are constantly migrating in their search for economic security and a better life for themselves and their families. Generally recognised push factors for migration include unemployment, low productivity and poor economic working conditions in the home countries. The pull factors include the opportunity for better employment, improving living conditions and the chance to advance in modern society (Kainth, 2009). He found that for Punjabis, employment decisions were characterised by a range of push and pull factors – the most significant being better employment opportunities followed by the chance to fulfil their self-aspirations and earn high wages.

Like Kainth (2009), Martin (2009) explored the push and pull factors in his research with Asia-Pacific communities. Again, these migrants gave prominence to economic factors, and referred back to the poor working conditions in their countries, the low wage jobs and the high rates of unemployment. Research in Belgium introduced another aspect of migrant aspirations, very much in line with the Pacific story (Van Meeteren, Engbersen & Van San, 2009). Here, many aspired to getting a steady job, higher wages, and a chance to increase their social capital. In addition however, they noted that being employed would enable them to send money home and/or to save sufficient money so they could return home to invest in a business. Findings from a study of

Tangkhal migrants to Delhi however saw employment as closely linked to education (Reimeingam, 2011). While seeking employment the participants also emphasised the importance of having a job that reflected their level of education.

A research report published for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Australia noted the availability of work closely followed by the availability of full time employment. Family as embodying social and cultural connectedness played a lesser part in the decisions these migrants made about where to settle (The Institute for Social Science Research, 2010).

### **Human developmental Stages and the Quarter Life Crisis**

As I reflected on my experiences after graduating, I wondered if my feelings of inadequacy were unique to me or were shared by other Tongan students. I also started trying to set or locate the meaning of this time in my life within my larger life journey. With this in mind, I turned from the literature which looked at the national impacts of tertiary study and graduate unemployment and started to look at the impact of these factors on the students themselves. In this vein, I began to review the literature on life cycle and developmental tasks intensively and I focussed more specifically on the adolescent and adulthood.

#### *Age stage development tasks*

Havighurst (1956) proposed a set of age grouped development tasks which must be achieved if people were to ensure a successful transition and adaptation to the challenges of later life (Havighurst, 1956). His interest was in the different stages of learning and when these could be best implemented (Merriam & Mullins, 1981). Havighurst proposed Infancy and early childhood (Birth till 6 years old), Middle childhood (6-12 years old), Adolescence (13-18 years old), Early Adulthood (19-30 years old), Middle Age (30-60 years old) and Later Maturity (60 years old and over). Havighurst (1956) proposed the developmental tasks comprised three areas e.g. those associated with physical maturation such as learning to walk, talk; those relating to personal values such as choosing an occupation and identifying what is of value in life and tasks that were sourced in social participation such as being a responsible citizen including agreeing to rules and

regulations for example. Havighurst as cited in Merriam & Mullins (1981) proposed the development tasks for ages 12 to 18 as follows;

One's body, adopt a masculine or feminine social role, achieve emotional independence from parents, develop close relationships with peers of the same and opposite gender, prepare for an occupation, prepare for marriage and family life, establish a personal value or ethical system and achieve socially responsible behavior (p. 34).

And for young adults - the ages 19 to 30;

"Develop a stable partnership then learn to live with the partner, establish an independent household, establish a family, care for a family, start an occupation or career, become integrated in a social group and assume civic and social responsibility" (p. 34).

Building on Havighurst, Erikson (1968) drew more attention to personal and identity related indicators. Erikson (1968) theorised adolescence as a time of storm and stress necessary for the later challenges in adulthood where these years would become a "prerequisite for physiological growth, mental maturation, and social responsibility" (Erikson, 1968, p. 91). Erikson's psychosocial theory highlights the influences of social and cultural aspects of the self, and identity formation was the quintessential point in which a person became an adult. He saw this stage of adulthood ranging between the ages of 21 to 40 where identity was formed and ready for the social experiences and everyday tasks of adulthood. Erikson emphasises the stage of adolescence, as a prominent and unique stage in life, and the experiences of young people are undoubtedly rooted in the changes they explore socially, cognitively and environmentally.

Steinberg and Cauffman (1996) describe the adolescence years as times when people learnt how to make decisions and judgements and to become self-assured in identifying their values and priorities so as to become less likely to be feeling insecure, self-conscious and confused in life (Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996). Maturity in adolescence according to psychologists and sociologists is having the cognitive ability to make decisions based on the interaction of cognitive and psychosocial factors (Mahmoud, 2011; Miller, 2011).

### *The genesis of the Quarter Life Crisis Model*

The developmental tasks model is age dependent, focuses on individual achievement of tasks and, is contextually specific to the times and to the context (place). Arnett (2007) notes that the

stage of 'adulthood' fitted a time when education finished at high school and people married, bought homes and created their own nuclear families. Furthermore, that early models were mainly based on middle class American demographics with little consideration for context and culture. He stressed the importance of cultural context in fully understanding peoples' experiences and development (Arnett, 2000).

In questioning the age-stages model. Arnett (2000) argued that the expansion of education has brought about a delay in the stage of adulthood and so the traditional age defined markers of adulthood (for example employment and marriage) are no longer relevant. In addition, that the current state of the economy, globalisation and the advancement of technology had changed the nature of youth development and prolonged the age in which people experience these transitions (Arnett, 2000; Atwood & Scholtz, 2008; Fadjukoff et al., 2007; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Arnett also proposed that those who experience emerging adulthood are from industrialised countries with ready access to prolonged periods of education and which, in turn, lead to an extended period of exploration of one's self (Arnett, 2000; Atwood & Scholtz, 2008).

### *Emerging adulthood concept*

Arnett (2010) describes adolescence as the time where puberty begins and the roles and responsibilities of adulthood are approached. He identified a stage of 'emerging adulthood' to define those who were no longer adolescent but had not yet achieved the 'adult markers' In his view, people in this age group experienced a fluidity of experiences which were impacted by their cultural setting. For example in certain cultures marriage can be experienced earlier or later than the periods proposed in the Erikson model.

Fadjukoff et al.,'s (2007) paper on '*The implications of timing of entering adulthood for identity achievement*' summarised five common external markers to show when adulthood is perceived to have been achieved. These are:

- Education completion
- Moving away from home
- Entering work

- Co-habitating with a romantic partner or marriage
- Having children

Using these external markers to assess identity completion, Fadjukoff et al., (2007) found a discrepancy between when participants considered themselves adults and actual identity formation.

Many researchers identify education as a major factor influencing positive and negative experiences in young adulthood. They contend that in western cultures higher education has become “a rite of passage into adulthood” (Black, 2010, p. 7) and that an individual becomes an adult when formal education is completed - whether it is high school or tertiary level (Kuther, 2006). In brief, today tertiary education has become an expectation for economic and social stability (Athanasou & Torrance, 2002; Atwood & Scholtz, 2008; Roberts, 1999). This expectation has resulted in an expansion of time spent in education and also, students’ dependence on parents during these years (Costello, Copeland, & Angold, 2011).

#### *The Quarter Life Model*

Building on Arnett (2000), Robbin and Wilner (2001) proposed the concept of the quarter life crisis. They describe QLC as a transition period where a young person experiences an identity crisis through the culture shock of moving into the “real world” after being a student. That individuals may experience symptoms varying from anxiety to panic attacks and depression, identity confusion, instability and loss while trying to establish themselves post study. Atwood and Scholtz (2008) are in agreement with Robbin and Wilner (2001) that there is a quarter life period experienced by people in the age group 18-35 years, and that this occurs regardless of education background. Their writing focuses more on social factors in the quarter life period.

Mahmoud (2011) found that young adults have difficulties coping with anxiety, decision making and life satisfaction. Sciaba’s (2006) studies about ‘emotion and emerging adulthood’ are consistent with literature on the QLC. Sciaba (2006) found negative emotions associated with this transition period where people experience change, instability and uncertainty. Black (2010) found

that a group of graduates from various colleges in America experienced symptoms of stress during this period although this was not so severe as to cause depression. Her study reported elevated levels of stress after graduation, feelings of frustration, helplessness and panic. Gal (2011) as well found in her research that young people in America usually associated this transition period with increased risk taking. Adults in Scandinavia also were found to be experiencing challenges in this transition period (Jacobsson, Tysklind & Werbart, 2011). These sample of young adults experienced difficulties dealing with concepts of self, family, partner intimacy, sense of belonging and occupational problems (Jacobsson et al., 2011).

### *Research on the QLC*

Because the QLC is a relatively new concept, little research on this phenomenon is known and found outside of America however one New Zealand study was located. Rasmussen (2009) explored the views a group of participants of mixed ethnic students from Massey University and found them to be experiencing the QLC. Her research focused on the psychological aspects of QLC, exploring their present experiences, their perception of success for the future and the reality of the QLC to them. She also explained university provisions to support a better bridging of their transitions out of university. Rasmussen (2009) linked the psychological effects of her participants to the QLC including the economy, the work force, being poorly paid and having debt. As a side note, Rasmussen commented that her data was gathered during a time of economic stability and that conditions might have gotten worse after the 2009 recession.

Rossi and Mebert (2011) research on college students in America contest the idea of there being a QLC at all. Their research explored the experiences of high school graduates and college graduates moving into the workforce and “found no empirical support (for) quarter life crisis” (Rossi & Mebert, 2011, p. 153). In their view college graduates were less likely to experience QLC as they were secure in their future plans and adjusted more confidently to life after graduation. Like QLC related research Rossi and Mebert did not disaggregate and explore the experiences of minority groups.

For my study I question whether Tongan graduates may be experiencing the QLC, the severity nature of it has yet to be revealed through the research, and whether their cultural background influences or averts this. However because their graduate experiences are set against non-Tongans it can be assumed that it will be different because their experiences may be measured against Tongan paradigms.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Homelands and New Zealand

As this research explores the experiences of Tongan graduates today and whether and how these may be influenced by their cultural beliefs and practices, it is important to set the research context. Three key points are raised in this two part chapter. First, in Part One the Tongan cultural values and beliefs which guide relationships and the importance of the spiritual and the family-based social systems which are embedded in the *anga faka-Tonga*. The place and valuing of education within the Tongan monarchy based social systems, along with the way these continue to spur the dream to migrate to New Zealand so as to 'get a good education' and achieve a better life will be discussed. Part Two is a short account of the experiences of Tongan communities in New Zealand today which, as is reported, is maintaining the spirit of the *anga faka-Tonga* with daily life behaviours and ceremony and maintaining relationships with the homeland.

#### **Part One: The homelands of Tonga**

The Kingdom of Tonga comprises over 170 volcanic islands located southwest of Samoa and Fiji. Given the widespread and isolated nature of these islands it is no surprise that 90% are uninhabited (Franklin, Drake, Bolick, Smith, & Motley, 1999) and that there are high levels of urban drift to Nuku'alofa, the seat of government, administration and commercial capital of Tonga, which offers better employment and educational opportunities (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2011). Nuku'alofa is situated on the main island of Tongatapu and it is home to 73% of the population. Tonga is the only Pacific nation ruled by a monarch and these are a clear separation in the social and political systems between those of royal blood and others. With 98% of the population being of Tongan ethnicity, the main language spoken is Tongan with English as a second language. Semi-subsistence agricultural production for home use, sale and exchange is the second highest means of income for the majority of the population making families an important social unit as well as the main production unit in contemporary Tonga (Völkel, 2010). With families having access to land (hereditary, residential plots or tax-allotments) 29% of families

rely on products such as fish and crops for income (Tonga Department of Statistics, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, & Demography Programme, 2008).

Table 1 provides a number of economic and social indicators to set the Tongan context. All data are from 2012 unless noted in the table

Table 1

***Social and Economic Indicators***

<b>POPULATION</b>	
<b>Population</b>	103,252
<b>Annual intercensal population growth</b>	0.2
<b>Crude birth rate per 1,000</b>	28
<b>Fertility rate</b>	3.9
<b>Median age</b>	21 years
<b>Youth (15-24)</b>	20.2%
<b>Urban migration</b>	32%
<b>Out - Migration rate (2011)</b>	International arrivals: 94,960
	Departures: 95,607
	Net outflow: 647
<b>SOCIAL</b>	
<b>Education (2006) (Access to)</b>	Primary Education: 94%
	Secondary Education: 75%
	Tertiary Education: 16.1%
<b>Religion (2006)</b>	Free Wesleyan Church: 41.3%
	Roman Catholic: 15.9%
	Latter Day Saints: 13.8%
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	
<b>GDP</b>	TOP 799.3 million
<b>GDP per capita</b>	TOP 7,738
<b>Imports</b>	TOP 345 million
<b>Exports</b>	TOP 13 million
<b>Aid</b>	TOP 115.8 million
<b>Remittances</b>	TOP 89,000,000

*Source:* From (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2012a; Tonga Department of Statistics, 2012b; Tonga Department of Statistics, Secretariat of the Pacific Community & Demography Programme, 2008).

Three main points are drawn from Table 1. First, the Tongan population is youthful with a median age of 21 (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2012a). Providing services such as education and health for this youthful population is a huge item on the national budget. Secondly, while primary schooling is universally available and a good transition to secondary schooling, there is no public provision of tertiary education - hence the importance of out migration to New Zealand for higher

study. There are a handful of training centres for information technology in Tonga and a small number of opportunities are available for tertiary study at Tonga's Atenisi Institute and through distance mode at the USP centre. Uata (2002) has noted that access to education in Tonga is highly competitive and that students are required to pay subsidised amounts in primary and secondary education or face expulsion, furthermore that education agencies function like private businesses, schools generating revenue through school enrolments. In competing for limited spaces within these schools Uata (2002) explains this competitiveness is necessary given the restricted available resources in Tonga.

Third, Table 1 shows high levels of out migration (with a net outflow of 647<sup>5</sup>) and the high levels of remittances. Estimates are that an equal number of Tongans live outside of Tonga as those remaining in Tonga (Morton Lee, 2003), and also noted that a significant number choose New Zealand as an ideal migration destination because of the migrant networks that reflect village life (Spoonley, Bedford, & Macpherson, 2003). Tonga has been labelled as a MIRAB economy characterised by migration, remittances, high levels of aid and bureaucracy e.g. the government is the major employer (Bertram, 2006). As seen in Table 1, exports also grossly exceed imports and there is heavy reliance on aid. The practice of remittance contributes significantly to Tonga's economic growth (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2012a). Over 82% of families reported have received remittances in the 12 months prior to the census and 20% of households reported that they relied on remittances for their main income (Tonga Department of Statistics et al., 2008). While Tongans living overseas experience the challenges of remitting (Addo, 2012; Vete, 1995), their desire to help stems from their *'ofa* to their families and a wish to share their wealth.

### *Social and cultural systems*

Three points are highlighted in this section of social systems: the *anga faka-Tonga*, the importance of rank and status and the place of the family.

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<sup>5</sup> This net flow of migration included all persons travelling in and out of the country, this includes tourists.

## *Anga faka-Tonga*

As is well reported, the *anga faka-Tonga* (Tongan way) is strongly observed in New Zealand's Tongan Community. It is important to identity, the *anga faka-Tonga* "encompasses all values, beliefs, and practices that are regarded as elements of Tongan culture and tradition" (Morton Lee, 2003, p. 1). It has much in common with the Pacific world view as described by Tamasese, Waldegrave, and Bush (2005) where the creator God is above all and in everything. Tamaese Ta'isi Efi (2007) describes the Pacific world view as being:

"a worldview that understands the environment, humans, the animate and inanimate- all natural life - as having its sources in the same divine origin, imbued with the life force, interrelated and genealogically connected" (p. 3).

The overarching place of the spiritual in the Pacific world view means every human action and behaviour is spiritually connected. Furthermore, the relationships and balance between these elements is maintained through acts of "sharing, reciprocity and nurturing relationships through respectful behaviours, especially towards elders and seniors" (Fairbairn-Dunlop, Boon-Nanai, & Ahio, 2014, p. 5). Tu'itahi (2005) uses the concept of *fonua* to describe the holistic nature and foundation of the Tongan culture. Combined in his view of the *fonua* elements of the spiritual, physical and ecological contexts these should never be separated as each factor in turn influences the others. The "*fonua* in this sense is central to notions of belonging and unity among Tongans, wherever they are and whoever they are" (Reuter, 2006, p. 359). The concept of *fonua* encapsulates the Tongan people's spiritual connection to the land: a one-ness between the land and people and with God. Tu'itahi categorizes the *fonua* as having five dimensions, which together ensure individual and social wellbeing. These are the *sino* (body), *'atamai* (mental), *laumalie* (spiritual), *kāinga* (collective/ community) and *'ātakai* (built and natural environment). When all these aspects are in a state of balance all is considered well. He summarizes the importance of *fonua* as

Maintaining a sustainable, harmonious and balanced relationship with nature and one's fellow human beings, both at the individual and collective levels, illustrates the spiritual dimension of *fonua*. Since the introduction of monotheistic religion, Tongans re-conceptualized the spiritual dimension of *fonua* to include God, the creator of the universe (Tu'itahi, 2005, p. 14).

Ka'ili (2005) elaborates on the *tā* and *vā* (Māhina, 2004) as the way the relationship and balance is maintained between these elements. He uses the description of the traditional mat weave to describe the concept of *vā* highlighting that Tongan ontology is spatially and socially connected e.g. that a person is made up of different kinship strands woven together genealogically. In the *anga faka-Tonga*, these elements of the *fonua* are fundamental to maintaining social cohesion including social functioning (Kalavite, 2010). Salesi Finau (2008) has proposed that the Christian faith now permeates all aspects of Tongan life and shapes Tongan culture to a point where it is difficult to distinguish between pre-colonial and post-colonial influences. Prescott (2012) notes that the Christian faith influences political and social activities and has “harmoniously aligned itself with the culture of kinship and *kāinga*” (p. 6).

### *Rank and place*

The Tongan social system is marked by the observation of rank and social hierarchy, the rank to which a person is born impacts directly on a persons' family status (Kaepler, 1971). Fig 1 sets the *fakatu'utu'unga 'o e sosaieti Tongá* (hierarchical social structure of Tongan society) as depicted by Kalavite (2010). In the *fakatu'utu'unga 'o e sosaieti Tongá* all families and members are highly conscious of each other's social standing where the appropriate behaviour and manner of respect must always be shown to one another (Bender, Spada, Seitz, Swoboda & Traber, 2007).

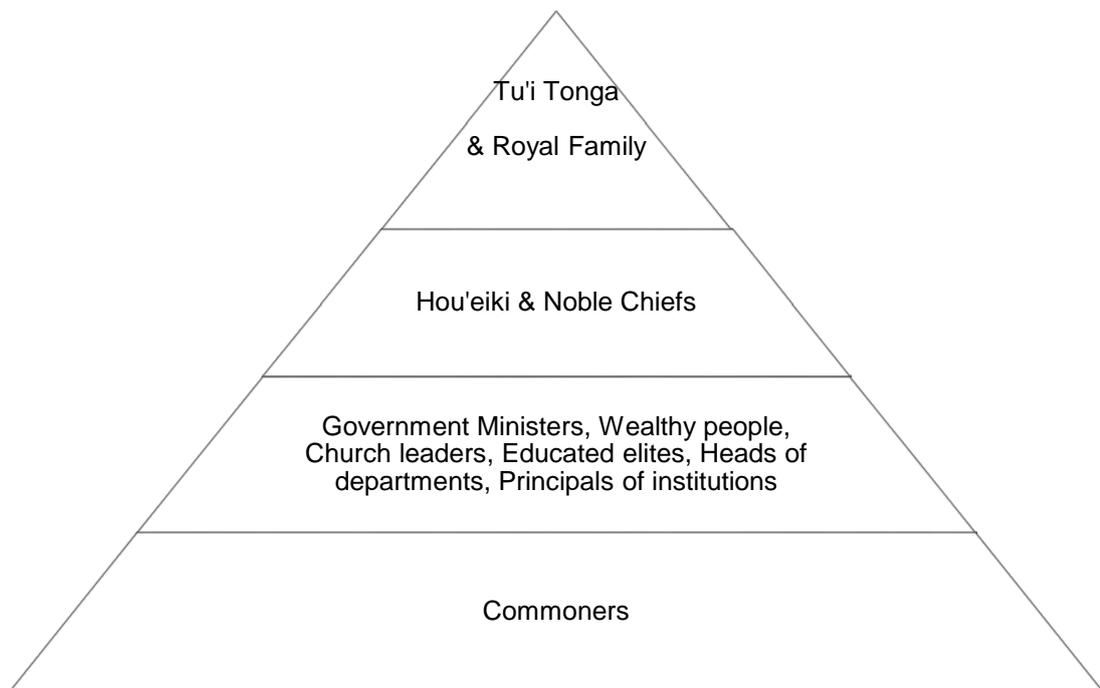


Figure 1. The *fakatu'utu'unga 'o e sosaieti Tongá* (hierarchical social structure of Tongan society). From Kalavite, T. (2010). *Fononga 'a fakahalafononga: Tongan students' journey to academic achievement in New Zealand tertiary education*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand).

At the head of the pyramid is the royal family, second is hou'eiki and nobility, and third is what Kalavite (2010) describes as the elite, which includes government officials, church leaders, wealthy and educated people. Fourth and at the bottom are the commoners, people with no known rank and status (Kalavite, 2010). A family's rank within the *kāinga* and *kakai* is dependent on their *ha'a*. Korn (1974) proposes that the status of 'commoners' signified distant relatives of the 10 main *ha'a* groups and their status and rank declines with the weakened connection created with the separation of generations within the *ha'a* group over time.

Earlier anthropologists such as Kaeppler (1971) and Aoyagi (1966) supported by Marcus (1975) that "one's status in the societal class structure is remarkably fixed" (p. 38). However the effects of modernisation, including the introduction of the cash economy, travel and the opening of schools has seen education become a means for social mobility (Kalavite, 2010). On this point, Cowling (2002) has proposed that those with status and money had access to education and the goods that resulted from this such as employment, income and luxury goods. Education opened up chances for people to be skilled and employable in the job market, so earning income which

was then used to contribute to the family good. Education gave people an avenue to achieve mobility and rise through the strict and stringent social structures of Tonga.

### *Kāinga and Fāmili*

Marcus (1974) describes the *kāinga* as a Tongan kin set composed of kinsmen “who actively maintain economic transactions and who mutually have an interest in and are responsible for each other’s economic position” (p. 91). Furthermore, the term *kāinga* is often used to describe the extended kinship group which organises together to ensure the basic needs of each family member are met. Although the term *fāmili* is more commonly used now to describe family (Cowling, 2002) the terms *fāmili* and *kāinga* are at times used interchangeably by Tongans when making connections and describing relationships (Aoyagi, 1966). As put so beautifully by Cowling (2002, p. 104) members of the *fāmili* are considered to “belong to each other”. Each member of a *kāinga* has a specific role, rank and status (James, 1997) and the expectation is that the smooth running of social events, ceremonies and meetings is achieved when each person performs their duties according to their rank.

The family is the main social unit: the place where children learn the values, beliefs, and expectations embedded in the *anga faka-Tonga* and in Tonga’s stratified social system. The overarching behavioural norms are *’ofa* which is a fundamental notion in the Tongan custom of *fetokoni’aki*. Churchward (1959), defines the term *fetokoni’aki* as “to help one another, to cooperate” (p. 178). It involves the sharing of burdens (tasks) that families experience in everyday life including the social *fatongia* that is placed on families within the church and community. *Fetokoni’aki* requires that family resources are shared so as to ensure the best quality of life for all members. The family group is responsible not only for shaping and socialising morals and values but also for the physical safety, economic stability and spiritual care of its members (Tu’itahi, 2005). Family decisions are not based on individual gain or accumulation of wealth but rather for the benefit of the *kāinga* and *’ātakai* where male and female roles and relationships are central organizing principles in the *anga faka-Tonga*.

Roles are classified by gender, with women usually having responsibility for the reproductive sphere and men the production domain (Gailey, 1996). While boys are given the freedom to explore, traditional upbringing confines young women to their homes where being docile, chaste and obedient is fostered until marriage where the young woman is then required to leave her village (James, 1994, 1997; Marcus, 1974). Kaepler (1971) describes the gender based ideological and behavioural notions as follows: that the father's family is superior to that of the mother; females will always have a higher role than males within the same generation kin, and finally that elders have a higher status than those younger than them and of the same sex. Reports note that the separation of male/ female begins from an early age. Following puberty brothers sleep away from the main house where sisters are housed (Aoyagi, 1966; Bennardo & Cappell, 2008). This separation during puberty emphasises sisters as being traditionally 'superior' in social and cultural settings (Kaepler, 1971; Rogers, 1977). A sister's superiority to their brothers has been described as a spiritual right derived from the sacred realm of pre-Christian ancestors (Herda, 1987). Although sisters' superiority within cultural and traditional settings is noted, their power within public affairs today has been described as non-existent (Herda, 1987) muted and, conditional (Besnier, 2007). According to Besnier, the sister-brother relationship metaphorically signifies how all Tongan members within the community should regard each other if social harmony is to be achieved. These gendered roles are reinforced culturally and also through the ideologies of the church (Gailey, 1996).

### *The Place of Education*

Education and learning have always been held in high esteem in Tonga and, Tonga's first Education Act was passed in 1882 (Allen, 1963). Thaman (2008) describes the traditional and ideal purpose of education as being the way to self and communal enhancement based on the belief that "we must first learn to know who we are; then we learn about other people; and finally we learn to live together" (p. 461). She uses the concepts of *ako* (learning), *'ilo* (values) and *poto* (knows and does it well) (see also Mahina, 2008) as basic understandings of the role and place of education for Tongans (Thaman, 2008). Simply put, education is perceived as the best way for the *fakalalakalaka* of a family ('Ilaiu, 1997). The more advanced a person becomes through study

the more *poto* is gained in their choice of study as well as handling conflicts within their family and social settings. Frengley-Vaipuna, Kupu-MacIntyre, and Riley (2011) comment that for Tongans being *poto* is “an ideal end point of socialisation” (p. 43) a process in which a person overcomes their *vale* (foolishness, social ineptness) to achieve knowledge, and to be able to achieve social status through their ability to influence others and their adeptness in social situations. The idea that family status can be raised through education has been given as a reason why many Tongans leave their shores in search of education (Faleolo, 2012; Kalavite, 2010).

Simply put, education has become the means to social mobility through Tonga’s highly stratified system (Gailey, 1996; Kaepler, 1971; Kalavite, 2010). Men and women have been able to use the prestige acquired through education to attain political and social power (James, 2003), marry nobility (Kaepler, 1971) and receive public acknowledgement (James, 1983). At times even, it has been reported that Tongan parents will bankrupt themselves to fund their children’s overseas education (Besnier, 2009). In sum, education is held to be a collective effort where the prestige gained is shared by the *fāmili* and *kāinga* (Gailey, 1996; Thaman, 2008).

Reports are that parents invest in the child with the greatest chance of employment, and because men are more likely to get hired after high school, parents are likely to support boys. This resulted in high numbers of female drop outs as investing in girls was considered wasting valuable resources (Gailey, 1996). Noted also is that in earlier days males were given first pick of scholarships from foreign aid (Bleakley, 2002) and the power of people of higher status, people of royal lineage, nobility and business owners to influence scholarship award was common (Small & Dixon, 2004). Cowling (2002) proposes that the concept of family and the ideologies that shape relationships can also be a motivating factor for families leaving Tonga. She also notes the prestige that migration can bring. That, while moving to another country can be a frightening experience and the idea of being detached from the *fāmili* and *kāinga* is disconcerting for most people, when a family has the courage to do so they gain social prestige along the way (Cowling, 2002).

## Part Two: The Tongan community in New Zealand

New Zealand, which has been described as the “Polynesian capital of the world” (Bedford, 1994, p. 187) has been a popular choice for Tongan and other Pacific migrants particularly in the 1960s and 1970s when it became known as the land of milk and honey (McKenzie, Gibson, & Stillman, 2013; Mallon, Māhina-Tuai, & Salesa, 2012). Reports indicate that, like other Pacific migrants, Tongans were enticed by the exciting new prospects of a better future for their families (Hill, Leauga, & Peita, 1982; Morton Lee, 2003; Prescott, 2009).

Several factors set the context for this research. First, the Tongan population in New Zealand is increasing steadily. The total Pacific population in New Zealand is 295,941 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013c) with 194,958 living in Auckland (Statistics New Zealand, 2013d); 101,937 reside in South Auckland (Tanielu & Johnson, 2014). Samoans form almost half the Pacific population number with 144,138 and then Cook Islands at 61,839 and then Tongans at 60,333. The Tonga population makes up 20.4%, 1/5 of the total Pacific population (Statistics New Zealand, 2013d). Although no recent data was found in the actual breakdown of ethnicity within South Auckland, the 2006 census shows 48% of Tongans lived there.

Second, as in Tonga, census data indicates the Tongan population is extremely youthful with a median age of 19 (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). A third point shown in the data that over 60% said they spoke the Tongan language, which was a 1% increase from the census in 2001 (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Fifty percent (50%) of this group were between the ages of 15-19 years and, somewhat unusually, this number decreased to 9% in the 45-49 year age group.

The security of the Tongan language is vital given that language is the carrier of cultural values and beliefs and practices – the *anga faka-Tonga*. Research indicates that Tongans use their language at every opportunity, in formal and informal settings (‘Aipolo & Holmes, 1990). Reuter (2006) claims that while language security remains stable, Tongans are still at risk of losing their language because many people take the language for granted. She draws on research showing language loss is prevalent amongst diaspora groups (Reuter, 2006). Starks, Taumoefolau, Bell, and Davis (2005) stress that language loss would result in an inability to communicate in one’s mother tongue, which in turn would have damaging consequences for culture loss. Taumoefolau,

Starks, Davis, and Bell (2002) draw attention to the challenges of mother tongue language maintenance within generational groups in migrant communities such as New Zealand today.

Fourth, the data shows the continuing importance of faith as well as the role of the church in Tongan migrant communities. In brief, 90% of Tongans in New Zealand are affiliated with a religion, comprising Methodist at 45%, Catholics at 21%, and the LDS at 12% (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). As noted in the earlier discussions, religion plays a role in the spiritual wellbeing of Tongans and provides a space for spiritual and social strengthening which is central to the *anga faka-Tonga*.

With respect to educational achievement significant gains are being made every year. Pacific numbers are increasing in secondary education (Tanielu & Johnson, 2014) as well as in tertiary education. The number of Tongan students in tertiary study continue to increase every year. In 2012 the number of 20-25 year old Tongan students enrolling in tertiary education increased by 10% as well as graduation rates increasing from 2045 in 2011 to 2206 in 2012. A report by the New Zealand Ministry of Education showed Tonga had the third highest number of international students in New Zealand technology and polytechnic institutions (Ministry of Education, 2013b). Fields of study for Tongans have also increased, General Education Programmes increasing by 22% from the year 2011, then Language and Literature by 14.1%, followed by Studies in human society at 12% (Education Counts, 2013a). The participation of Tongan males in tertiary education increased by 3.5% in 2012. However this is still low in comparison to females increase by 6.5% and contributed 858 more than the overall number for male participation (Education Counts, 2013a).

Despite these and other gains, generally speaking like other Pacific peoples, Tongans in New Zealand have lower levels of education, are mainly working in the semi- to lower-skilled occupations where wages are lower and have poor health outcomes (Ministry of Health, 2013; Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010). As noted in these reports, Pacific people have the worst health of any groups in New Zealand from birth through to later years.

### *The community response to challenges*

Frengley-Vaipuna et al., (2011) and others note some of the challenges Tongans have faced in adapting to New Zealand society. That in migrating to New Zealand for example, they are continually challenged to adopt western individualistic ideologies and behaviours which may be at odds with their cultural duties. Kalavite (2010) also highlights the struggles for Tongans in adjusting to living in New Zealand when moving for the purposes of education. By way of contrast, Mafile'o (2005) proposes Tongans are not new to change and in diaspora communities where "Tongan culture is simultaneously reproduced and transformed" (p. 108). Also, that the transient and shifting nature of Tongan migration patterns has made them resilient in the face of national and global struggles. Lilo (2010) viewed the Tongan culture as being "a pure entity impervious to foreign influence" (p. 14) and its existence as integral to Tongan identity. That although it has been adapted, in some sense, the whole nature of Tongan culture remains the same.

The New Zealand Government has introduced a number of proactive measures to support cultural maintenance such as the Tongan language in education. For example Tongan subjects are now offered in secondary schools at levels 1-3 of NCEA and the University of Auckland offers papers in Tongan studies. In addition, the New Zealand government strongly supports the use of Tongan language week, the aim of which is to revitalise and highlight language issues. Further, that there are also several weekly radio programmes catering to specific Pacific island groups, for example, 531 P.I and 1593 AM.

At the same time, it is highly evident that the endurance of the *anga faka-Tonga* and cultural strength has been supported strongly by Tongan driven strategies and measures, for example by the church, family systems and the community (Kalavite, 2010). In a first example, Lilo (2010) credits the church with providing the setting for Tongans to congregate, practise culture and worship in their language. The establishment of Tongan churches began shortly after the 1960 and 1970 migrations. As outlined by Lilo (2010), in earlier years Tongans attended English led church services. Here, they were able to retain and practise some aspects of their culture by, for example, forming choirs and/or singing Tongan hymns. This small opening led to Tongan families being given time on Sundays to run their own service in the Tongan language and eventually led

groups to become affiliated in 1983 into the Methodist Church of New Zealand which in 2000, was later established as the Vahefonua Tonga 'O Aotearoa as its own synod.

In addition, Tongan led and approved development agencies have also been established and organised in New Zealand, highlighting the ideal as mentioned by Finau and Finau (2007) that for maximum success these services should be provided and being carried out in the Tongan language by Tongan providers. One example of this is *Langimālie*, a Tongan clinic that offers medical services to Tongans. Established in 1997, *Langimālie* is now regarded as a key primary health organisation (Ryan, Beckford, & Fitzsimons, 2010). *Langimālie* is well known for its endorsement of health care for Tongans and for its use of the Tongan language in administering health care and disseminating health information to the Tongan Community. In another example, Fehoko (2013) draws attention to the importance of the traditional practice of the *faikava* in the lives of young people in New Zealand today. He argues that this informal practice is giving male Tongans in diaspora communities the opportunity to engage in a cultural practice that is effectively re-affirming and establishing relationships as well as helping young men address life issues. By re-connecting and forming their Tongan identity as a diaspora, these kava and community clubs become forums of learning, reinforcing and maintaining language and culture (Fehoko, 2013).

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the Tongan world view and social systems and the importance of family as the source of personal identity and security. As seen, the *anga faka-Tonga* values and beliefs are deeply embedded in ceremonial rituals and every day activities in the homelands and in New Zealand. This is especially seen in the valuing of relationships. The traditional importance of education as teaching the knowledge needed to ensure family and community good was noted as was the fact that education is now a main avenue for status raising in Tonga's monarchical society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Research Design and Method

To capture the lived-experiences of Tongan graduates in New Zealand, a qualitative design was used featuring the phenomenological approach (Denscombe, 1998) and the *talanoa* research method (Vaiotele, 2006). The *talanoa* method was used for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a common tool of communication that is used by Tongan communities, and secondly, as an ethical stance given the background of the participants and the Pacific worldview, which stems from the *anga faka-Tonga*. This chapter is in three parts. Part 1 presents the theoretical framework of the research, Part 2 describes the method used to collect the data and Part 3 presents some personal reflections on the fieldwork.

#### Part One: Research Design

##### *Qualitative*

A qualitative enquiry was seen to be best suited for the purposes of the research, as I was interested in exploring the voices and experiences of Tongan graduates in their immediate post-graduation period. The qualitative approach is concerned with how people construct their realities, their experiences and the meanings they assign to these realities (Merriam, 2009). This approach is driven “significantly from this process orientation toward the world” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30) and enables those participating to present ‘inside out’ perspectives of the phenomena being explored (Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004). Qualitative research also honours and accepts that the social setting in which a person is placed is unique and complex (Hatch, 2002) and therefore, can be applied to a variety of contexts (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). The flexibility of qualitative research also facilitates the inclusion of the cultural beliefs and practices of participants – in this case the Tongan graduates into the research process.

Maxwell (2013) summarizes five goals of qualitative research which are applicable to this research. These are, that qualitative research explores peoples’ realities; their individual meanings drawn from their experiences; the context in which they experience this and the

influence of context as well as the process in which they experience it. Lastly to always be aware of the risks of uncovering any unanticipated factors.

### *Phenomenology*

I chose phenomenology as my qualitative research methodology because this focuses on “people’s perception or meanings, attitudes and beliefs, feelings and emotions” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 94). Phenomenology is not so much concerned with the cause of the experience but with how it is experienced and therefore ‘brackets’ off pre-conceived ideas and knowledge of the phenomena (Langdridge, 2007).

The study of phenomenology assumes that knowledge can be attained through the sharing of “common meaning of mutual history, culture and language of the world” revealing the meaning behind one’s experience rather than proving and conceptualizing theory (Flood, 2010, p. 7). In Husserl’s view, one’s experiences are independent of the phenomenon (Lewls & Staehler, 2010). Alfred Schutz (1962) built on Husserl’s intersubjectivity theory of phenomenology “with questions of social existence and social relations, foundational issues for the social sciences” (Kim & Berard, 2009, p. 264). That, as people attach their own individual meanings to their social experiences, phenomenology would then allow the researcher to “analyse their intentional experience of consciousness to perceive how the phenomenon is given meaning and its essence” (Sadala & Adorno Rde, 2002 as cited in Flood, 2010, p. 8).

Drawing on these and other readings, I knew that a phenomenological design would provide the space for Tongan graduates to express their experiences and enable the researcher to document these (Lewls & Staehler, 2010). As a pragmatic approach, phenomenology also enabled the inclusion of a consideration for the Tongan world view, so in turn creating the space where the overall context of their experiences could be taken into account so leading to a better understanding of the graduates’ experiences. As the Tongan graduate experiences are most likely culturally influenced, I saw the use of phenomenology as helping ensure that their stories were well expressed and understood. My experience as a member of a minority group allowed me to understand the importance of seeing ‘the other’; that is acknowledging the differences in

social realities and trying to look at something through the eyes of the minority. This openness to subjective knowledge gave the opportunity to explore new thinking and philosophy. Phenomenology is ideal for the exploration of Pacific peoples' lived realities as it acknowledges the wholeness of entities, taking into account all angles (Moustakas, 1994).

### *Talanoa*

I wanted to ensure my research approach resonated well within the phenomenological family and with Tongan worldview (see Chapter Three). The *talanoa* was therefore ideal for this indepth enquiry and reinforced the importance of using a Pacific knowledge-sharing tool to construct Pacific knowledge. The interpretive method of *talanoa* like phenomenology- views people's realities as socially constructed (Walsham, 2006).

The *Talanoa* is described as a traditional method of story sharing and information gathering, wherein the data collection becomes "a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 23). It is culturally appropriate because it fits with the voices of the participants. Second, this was also ethnically correct as the *talanoa* is the commonly used conversation process in the *anga faka-Tonga*. The use of the *talanoa* also guarded against the well reported experience whereby minority groups, such as Tongan people, have been subjected to disempowering research. For example western researchers have interpreted and constructed what they claim to be the realities of their participants based on their own western perspectives (Vaioleti, 2006). To counter this, Pacific researchers strongly emphasize the use of indigenous epistemologies and research strategies which are grounded in people's values, beliefs and how they view the world and ways of knowing (Gegeo & Gegeo, 2001). Third, the use of the *talanoa* was considered an appropriate method of enquiry as it incorporates the holistic nature and practices of Tongan communication and interaction. Its philosophical base is "collective, orientated towards defining and acknowledging Pacific aspirations" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 26).

Leading Tongan researcher Vaioleti (2006) has proposed that the term *talanoa* is comprised of two parts, to *tala* and *noa*. To *tala* means to "inform, tell, relate and command" and *noa* means "of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 23). In critiquing this view, Halapua

(2000) proposes the term *noa* to mean, “without concealment” and I am in agreement with this. Halapua describes the *talanoa* as the opportunity for all parties to voice their issues freely and a process where people feel free to engage in face to face dialogue without “concealing their inner feelings and experiences” (Halapua, 2000, p. 1).

Finally the *talanoa* is a historical process of information sharing, the fundamental purpose being to improve the social life, cohesion and advancement of all members of Pacific communities. Jione Havea (2010) describes *talanoa* as a complex affair. He rebuts strongly what he sees as a widely held assumption which views *talanoa* as romanticized and as ‘just’ a form of storytelling which perhaps inadvertently has reinforced the idea that *talanoa* are uncritical and, as oral accounts, do not match western standards of credibility drawn from written evidence (J.Havea, 2010). Instead, J.Havea argues that unlike the western concept of storytelling, *talanoa* involves participants actively engaging in the information process and contesting and reflecting during the exchange.

Despite western perceptions that oral history is folklore, *talanoa* have been instrumental in shaping the identity of people in the Pacific (Halapua, 2000; J.Havea, 2010). In this process the stories mean more than storytelling, and are shared for the purpose of connecting and building knowledge, history and traditional wisdom (Halapua, 2000; J.Havea 2010; Prescott, 2009). Furthermore, as reported, the connection between researcher and participants fostered in the *talanoa* ensures a smooth and enriching dialogue which promotes subjective inquiry, prompting flexibility and stimulating critical discussions. *Talanoa* also creates a spiritual relationship between participants, by reinforcing and nurturing the *vā* which is fundamental to the social functioning of Tongan peoples (Kalavite, 2010). The use of *talanoa* gives participants the time and space to reflect on and honour their journeys (Ka’ili, 2005), and so gives them equal responsibility for what is discussed and how this is discussed. This constitutes a mutually empowering experience. I was well aware also that my knowledge of the Tongan language and culture would encourage and facilitate effective *talanoa*.

For this research two types of *talanoa* were used, involving two different kinds of conversation. The first two questions engaged participants in exploring their views and perspectives. However

question three required a different kind of *talanoa*, wherein participants were asked to reflect on and critique their graduate experiences against the QLC model. This required a synthesis of new learning, as in Bloom's taxonomy<sup>6</sup>.

## **Part Two: Method**

### *Individual interviews - talanoa*

The use of individual interviews was considered best for this pilot research for a number of reasons. The face to face discussions would facilitate and engender the building of rapport and trust in the interview, giving each participant a safe place to share with the researcher (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Individual interviews were also appropriate given the sensitive nature of the information to be shared: it was anticipated that the post-graduation experiences were private and highly personal and best shared in a one on one *talanoa*. This was important also as the Tongan community in New Zealand is a very small one and participants were likely to know each other. Individual *talanoa* would result in rich data which in turn would support the research aims of creating new knowledge (Guest et al., 2013).

As my *talanoa* 'had a purpose' (J.Havea, 2010) I prepared an interview schedule to guide the conversation (see Appendix 1) and whilst I knew that English would likely be used, I also knew that the use of the Tongan language would facilitate an understanding of the deeper nuances of Tongan cultural expressions. The interview schedule was semi structured to allow for a flexible flow of topics and enable participants to explore additional issues as they wished (Denscombe, 1998; Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Nevertheless at all times priority would be given to the issues participants regarded as important. The interview schedule was piloted and some reworking of items took place as well mainly to ensure inclusion of positive questions.

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<sup>6</sup> Bloom's taxonomy or classification lists levels of thinking and objectives for learning, lowest level of learning is remembering knowledge, second is to understand it, third apply the new knowledge and the highest is to analyze, critique and create new knowledge (Bloom, 1956).

## *Sample*

My research sample was to be up to 12 graduates, between the ages 20-29 (as this was the age described by Robbin and Wilner (2001) as prone to the QLC) who resided in Auckland. Aims were for equal representation by male to female, those presently employed and not employed, and by different universities, eg. There was likely to be differences in experiences by students who had lived away from home during their studies and those who lived at home. The snowball approach was used to recruit participants, whereby first identified participants nominated others who fitted the research criteria, conditions and characteristics (Denscombe, 1998, 2010). Denscombe (2010) describes the snow ball approach as a fast recruiting system which is perfect for small scale research. Further that this approach should ensure contact with the appropriate people so enhancing credibility. This is supported by Creswell (2012) who notes that the purpose of snowballing is to identify "cases of interest from people who know other people who know what cases are information-rich" (p. 158).

There were four steps in my recruitment process. First, that I present my research at a youth or similar Tongan community gathering (e.g. a youth church meeting) and include information about the importance of this study, why I was carrying this out and also that I share my own story. Second that those attending would be given information about the research and invited to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. In addition, they would also be asked that if they knew others they thought might fit the research criteria to give them my number and invite them to contact me. Third, that those who contacted me and expressed an interest in participating would be sent by email an information sheet plus consent forms for their consideration. Furthermore these forms would need to be signed before the *talanoa* began. As a young Tongan graduate myself I deliberately chose this process so that I would not be considered biased and accused of only talking to my peer group. Table 2 sets out the actual participants recruited in this research. They comprised a range by gender (6 male and 6 female), by age (23-29) years and by degree (from undergraduate through to Masters). Although I had planned on recruiting graduates from different fields of study, the majority were in the Arts and Social Science and Business.

Table 2

***The participants, by gender, age, degree and employment status.***

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Male/Female</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>
<b>P1</b>	M	29	BBus	EM
<b>P2</b>	M	24	BCS	EM *
<b>P3</b>	F	25	BBus	EM*
<b>P4</b>	F	24	BA	EM
<b>P5</b>	M	26	MPH	UN
<b>P6</b>	M	24	BCom	EM
<b>P7</b>	F	26	BA, PG dip Teach	EM
<b>P8</b>	F	25	MPH	UN
<b>P9</b>	M	27	MLAW	EM *
<b>P10</b>	M	23	BSocSci	EM
<b>P11</b>	F	27	BSocSci & PG dip	EM
<b>P12</b>	F	24	MPP	EM

*Note:* \* Signifies participants who went straight into the workforce after graduation, EM signifies those who were employed during the study and UN signifies those unemployed at the time of the study,

As seen in Table 2 10 of the 12 were employed at the time of the study while the two who were not employed said they had just finished their masters' degree and were on a break 'thinking about what to do next'. Three said they had gone directly into a job that matched their degree when they had graduated and had been satisfied with that. The other seven had not had such a smooth experience. Three of the ten employed worked in government departments, 2 were teachers, 2 in customer service roles, 1 lawyer, 1 accountant and a journalist. Their qualifications shown in Figure 1 must be borne in mind in interpreting this data as well as gender and location.

***Data analysis***

Initially I had intended that each *talanoa* be transcribed and thematically analysed supported by the Nvivo software programme (Richards, 1999). However during a preliminary analysis of the pilot data by the Nvivo9 programme I became wary about losing closeness with my data as described by Bazeley and Jackson (2013). I found I had begun looking for recurring words instead

of themes. For example I had become so caught up with making my research rigorous that I began segmenting my data.

So I began reviewing my data using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). This allowed me to analyse the transcribed *talanoa* through the eyes and experiences of the participants while maintaining a relationship and control over the analysis process. Smith and Osborn (2008) describe IPA as a process of understanding participants' meanings and how participants construct their personal and social realities. IPA is a researcher's commitment to the participant as a thinking and physical being. Therefore in keeping with my commitment I read and re-read my data a number of times to identify recurring themes within each transcript. Honing in on those identified themes, I re-read the *talanoa* transcripts some more to identify sub themes. The many themes and sub themes that emerged are discussed in Chapter Four.

### *Ethics*

Ethical approval was obtained from the AUT Ethics committee (AUTEC) because sensitive topics such as identity, employment and other issues were going to be discussed; commitments were primarily made to the AUTEC for participant human rights and cultural protection (see Appendix 2a).

### **Part Three: Field Reflections**

Overall, carrying out this research was an extremely valuable learning time for me in a number of ways. I was comfortable using a cultural method of enquiry indigenous to Tongans as I was familiar with the practice engaged by my elders and community people around me. The structure of *talanoa* was familiar to me as I had grown up listening to the sequence of the types of conversation that are central to the *talanoa*. This familiarity reassured me as well as heightened my confidence in engaging participants in the study.

I became more confident in the method as the interviews progressed, I got used to the probes and prompts that followed questions as allowed for a better flow as the conversations with each participant progressed. For a first time researcher I believe *talanoa* was accommodating to the

limited skills I held as a researcher. I was able to utilise a skill I had not realised I already understood. This proved effective as it gave me a skillset which fitted the type of research I was to engage in and the background of the participants.

The method was empowering as a researcher. Upon reflecting I realised that research can be an empowering experience for a minority and for minority group experiences; especially speaking in our native tongue for the purpose of research. It was different, for myself as the researcher as well as the participants, and a first time for some of us to engage in *talanoa* for the purpose of research.

As previously mentioned the method engaged participants smoothly. It was very effective because the connection was made easy, the synergy Vairoletti (2006) talks about was natural because it was automatic and second nature for many of us. The familiarity due to our background was deepened more with the respect that comes with the acknowledgement and the engagement of any cultural practice. Secondly, as graduates who understood the struggle after graduation and the inability to find work, connected us in our struggle and similar experiences. In this research, we became people of the same cohort, exploring what had happened after our graduation - sharing information, data and stories that we knew were relevant to our *talanoa*. This led to the ultimate connection because we were working for the same purpose; to build the understanding of our experiences and the need to document and share this information. The participants were thankful for the opportunity to share their stories and often expressed a relief at being able to do so. As a result many *talanoa* went considerably longer than their assigned interview times.

### *Recruitment*

Before any recruitment was carried out I had approached a church youth group during the month of January as this was when youth programmes were most active during the holiday season. As it was an informal meeting outside church no consent was needed from church leaders as the *taki potungāue talavou* (youth leader) was present. For my sampling my affiliation with the Tongan Methodist church and being a member of a tight knit Tongan church community facilitated my approach to another group of church youth other than my own where I identified a group of

participants. Being a young Tongan graduate made the process smooth, as we were implicitly connected through our identity as Tongans and experiences as graduate students. Snowball was a successful recruitment method, linking me to potential people to interview. This continued throughout the information gathering phase until all 12 participants were recruited and engaged in *talanoa*.

While interest was high, securing the actual interviews was a lengthy process. It became very evident that these graduates were extremely busy and something was always 'coming up' at the last minute. Four participants re-scheduled interviews a number of times due to time constraints associated with their jobs and other responsibilities. Another two of the initial group eventually withdrew because of work commitment: It is probable that my reminders of meeting times and place had been causing them stress.

### *Talanoa*

Looking back, I can see that our first *talanoa* may not have been as good as I would have hoped, mainly because I was new to the process and was unsure and lacked confidence. In the first interviews I tended to keep to the interview schedule almost as a safety mechanism rather than letting the conversations flow and picking up on points of obvious concern to participants. This is probably reflected in the data collected in the early interviews compared with the richness of those following. Fearing that certain aspects of the study were being left unexplored I became nervous and the rigorous interviewing inevitably dragged out interview times. However as the interviews progressed, so did my confidence. The *talanoa* sessions became focused and intentional (J.Havea, 2010), interview times shortened as the process gained more direction. I assumed my role as facilitator, leading with a purpose, being transparent and realising that feeling safe was a reciprocal thing between those involved in the *talanoa* (Vaiotele, 2006). I felt more in control and this newfound confidence allowed for relevant exploration that not only flowed but was encouraging as a researcher when the participants were shown to be at ease during the process.

My lack of confidence earlier on was probably also due to the fact that the participant group was highly qualified. However I soon realised that because the participants were keenly interested in

the issue- and in presenting their perspective about what should be done, my fears were groundless. As in a true *talanoa*, my role was to provide the space for dialogue, know some of the issues as outlined in the literature, and draw on my own experiences. My own confidence was built with the constant refining of my research skills and knowledge through the interview process to a point where we shared ownership of the information shared and this creation of new knowledge.

### *Talanoa as a practice*

One reoccurring reflection after the first couple of interviews was the feeling that participant answers were being shaped by my *talanoa*. Before the research I had been rather wary of how the *talanoa* was carried out, and feeling as though the interviews were biased. The fact that the interviewer had to contribute just as much as the interviewee during the *talanoa* was something that I adapted to over the course of the interviews. Relearning and adjusting to this recognised Pacific research method where objectivity was something that I was taught throughout my educational life.

My earlier education had begun in Tonga where education policy encouraged and promoted total immersion in the English ways (R.Havea, 2010), and the belief that the *pālangi* way and knowledge was superior (Smith, 2012). Even though my attitude after years at university was less intense on this point, my approach to research was still shaped by certain empiricist aspects that this be completely value free and neutral, that data that was collected had to be unbiased. The idea of Pasifika methodology was unknown to me during my undergraduate studies. I had grown accustomed to learning by osmosis, learning western concepts of knowledge and abiding by universal laws that promoted empiricist research. However *talanoa* has become more than just a method; I realised that this process of dialogue which is innate to my culture and identity was what I used to converse with my own parents, relatives and Tongan community members. Using the *talanoa* became a process of enlightenment, of taking authority over my indigenous knowledge and granting it power as a minority. *Talanoa* became not only an investigative tool but a philosophical overview.

## *Being Tongan*

At the beginning of each *talanoa* rapport was built as we exchanged information about our study and our connections through people or to villages back in Tonga, often joking about this connection. This making light of the situation, helped participants feel safe and at ease. The success of *talanoa* was evident in the flow of talk and, the *māfana* (see Manu'atu, 2000). Although it would have been expected that graduates might find the topic of unemployment sensitive and withdraw, the exact opposite happened. I believe that the use of the Tongan language reinforced the feelings of connecting and relationships and encouraged our sharing of stories. The richness of their stories at times could only be told using Tongan words or described with Tongan phrases. Our shared understanding of Tongan language and knowledge had made me privy to information that could not have been unearthed if a non-Tongan had conducted the research (Kanuha, 2000).

Researching as an insider contributed to helping retrieve the rich stories about their graduate journeys. The ongoing debate of insider or outsider researcher continues today (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Gegeo & Gegeo, 2001; Kanuha, 2000; Sanga, 2004). In this case I believe it was important that these graduate experiences were discussed and understood by a researcher of the same culture. My ability to not only understand their language but also to engage in dialogue contributed to the depth and breadth of their stories shared (Kanuha, 2000).

Their sense of relief at being interviewed, brought a feeling of the interviews being 'right' at that point in time and gave a sense of enthusiasm to my study as well as hope for their individual graduate journeys. Many asked why there had been no studies to date especially as they saw that many of their peers were also experiencing the same experiences. The *talanoa* were very deep, emotional and the previously untold stories challenged the conflict between their family responsibilities and duties to maintain these roles in the church, family and their own personal journeys.

Judging by their physical response in body language and voice it was obvious that many were grateful for the opportunity to express their feelings. Many had suppressed these emotions for fear of being seen as unappreciative of their opportunities and the sacrifices made by their parents. Not wanting to sound ungrateful, many kept reassuring me of their appreciation of how

far they had progressed and that their emotions were caused by factors separate from their graduate opportunities. Many were surprised to learn that their experiences had a name and were group specific. Their greatest relief however was that their experiences were being understood as a part of their present stage in life and discovering that they were not so alone.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings: Tongan Post graduate Experience

This chapter presents findings from the *talanoa* with the 12 participants on their post-graduation experiences. This discussion is in three parts in line with the following research questions: what were the experiences of Tongan graduates' after graduation? What can be done to smooth out their transition into work after graduation? And third, how do their experiences align with the Quarter Life Crisis (QLC) literature? As noted in Chapter Four, research questions one and two focused directly on graduate's experiences. However, for question three, graduates reviewed their own experiences against the concept of QLC, a human development or life stages model. As had been anticipated, most had not heard of the QLC, therefore the question three *talanoa* constituted more of a reflective type discussion.

Every *talanoa* demonstrated the expectation that education (and getting a tertiary qualification especially) would almost automatically guarantee graduates a job, and so part one begins with a discussion about the importance of education to this group. This is followed by their accounts of their individual post-graduation journeys to finding employment and steps to address the differences they had experienced in getting a job. This chapter concludes with a brief review of their perceptions about whether they saw their journey as differing from that of non-Tongan (*pālangi*) graduates.

#### *The Importance of Education*

While financial reasons and, getting a job had become significant motivation for these participants to get a degree, they also raised other factors that related more to a cultural valuing of education, and the *anga faka-Tonga*. These indicated that education was a duty to family and community, and that 'getting degreed' effectively honoured the sacrifices their parents had made (and were making) in coming to New Zealand. The need to honour parents' struggles was stated by all participants. They spoke of the pressures (and responsibility) they felt to achieve the dreams and goals which had driven their parents to migrate. Irrespective of whether they came from a first or second generation migrant family, these participants had learnt and understood the migration

dream very well. This was firmly ingrained in their minds. Getting a degree had signified that their parents' struggles in migrating to a new land had not been in vain. One participant described what it meant to a family when a member graduated with these words:

"They (Tongan graduates) have a lot of pressure I feel .. after uni because most families that are Tongan have come from Tonga for a better life so there's a pressure for those graduates to find work ... they're like the key, the answers, the prayers to their parents coming from the islands in the first place"  
(PF12)

Another said education was the 'key' to a better future. He shared his mother's advice which had been and was still a central point in his upbringing:

"My mum's always told me 'ke feinga malohi he ako' (try your hardest in school) coz it's kind of like my key and that's what's going to get you through life. So it's always been part of our upbringing" (PM2)

The view that education was the avenue to increasing family status was also stressed. More than one participant acknowledged that it had become the norm for Tongans to strive 'to go as high in education as they can', because this added to the family status. This view is in line with the literature that education was not only a way of learning new knowledge (Māhina, 2004, Thaman, 2008). PM9 said:

"... it's positive in that (Tongan) people are striving with education to climb the social ladder because the higher the education is the more respected and the higher your rank is. That wasn't traditional because rank was born into but it kind of developed because of the emphasis of education amongst Tongans and I think that came from royalty, Queen Salote with the pushing of Tongans to get well educated, they started it there and all the Tongans followed"  
(PM9)

PF12 saw her success in graduating and finding employment as contributing to a better quality of life for herself and her family. She said this was something her parents had been unable to experience when they were living in Tonga. PM9 and PM1 also explained that being Tongan brought an obligation to look after the family group:

"Yup, because in the Tongan culture you're kind of brought up to work as a family group where everyone chips in and everyone provides for this even though you're working hard out its not necessarily working for yourself but you're working for your family" (PM9)

"I think our Tongan people are very proud people, in a good way. Very proud and we love that, we love to make sure that we can provide for our families and stuff and that's something that I love about our people you know" (PM1)

PM9 noted the personal as well as the social and family benefits of education. He said:

“It’s been a major part in who I am. It has changed who I am, I’m no longer just (his name), I am (his name) the lawyer. That’s the thing a lot of people don’t refer to me by my name but as lawyer- I don’t like it but it shows their respect but you know how Tongans are, it’s polite to refer to someone by their title rather than their name whereas it is different in the western culture” (PM9)

Another participant (PF8) said that for her father, her degree signified more than ‘a qualification’.

That, in gaining a degree in the same field as her medical specialist uncles, she had ‘maintained the family tradition’. In sum, she was upholding her family status within that field. PF8 said:

“I have two uncles; my dad adores them because they’re like specialists now in the medical area... They’ve gone to Britain and studied there and they’ve got two or three fellows each... my dad is so proud of them, not only that he tries to promote it to the rest of us so that we eventually do something like that, be known in this area, not only amongst Pacific people but in general. The fact that he has family that has done so well in the education area, he wants us to become that, reach our peak and doing the best we can and become known in the education area” (PF8)

Life skills were also important. Participants described education as the pathway to learning life skills so that they and their families would be secure in the future when their parents ‘passed on’.

They used words such as that their studies would have ‘prepared them for the realities of adulthood’. PF12 said that her father had always stressed that education was the chance to learn independence. She said:

“... (that) we don’t struggle, my dad always says to me that we go to school so that we are responsible because one day when they go and when they pass away we are able to look after ourselves” (PF12)

In similar vein, PF3 described education as the way Tongan parents tried to ensure the well-being of their family now and for future generations. She said:

“... (an) opportunity for our future generation as well the generation we’re currently in to set good examples for the little ones. I would say that most Tongans would use education to build the next generation up within the family making sure that they will be ok because they kind of see education as something that will hold the family together and to give them wisdom” (PF3)

PM5 noted the personal benefits of education. That study had given him the chance to learn basic life skills (such as budgeting) which were important to later life. He described his time at university in this way:

“not only has education at Auckland university help me get a degree but also has given me the life skills and the basic life skills, even managing my money you know you get 150 a week from studylink and you’re expected to make that last a week” (PM5)

PM1 said education taught the skills people needed to ensure quality of life for family and community. He said:

“I think the Tongan community, education is important- it’s essential. It’s really important that we encourage our Tongan (people) to get to school and get to uni as it’s essential to helping out- ke toe fakalelei ange ia ‘etau ngāué mo e nofo fakafāmilí (it’s going to improve the way we work and function as a family) so I think it’s very important” (PM1)

Differences by gender were also noted. As discussed, in Tonga’s traditionally patriarchal society, males are often regarded to be the decision makers and carers for the family and females are most likely to marry and move in or near to the husband’s family (Marcus, 1974; James, 1994). Five participants stated quite firmly that Tongan males were more likely to be pressured by their families to gain a good education because they were seen to be the future family leaders. In agreeing with this, PF7 said her family had put more pressure on her brothers than on her. She explained,

“When the girls in a Tongan family leave and get married they’re out, so it’s harder for my brothers because my mum puts pressure on them than she did on me. Maybe it’s that mentality where men are providers, the woman are you know; take care of the domestic side. I don’t know, but she wasn’t hard on me to find work” (PF7)

The idea that male members had an ongoing responsibility to the family was supported by PM9 who also highlighted the power of the gendered expectations of the *anga faka-Tonga*:

“.. because in the Tongan culture my understanding is that especially with guys even if you’re married you still have the obligation to assist your wider family group, parents and your sisters as well. It’s different for the girls because when they get married their obligation is to their husband and their family so there’s sort of a difference” (PM9)

Other participants agreed that it was important that females have a good education. However, it is notable that these views were not framed as an equity issue but in terms of women’s place in the family. For example, PM6 believed that a young single Tongan female should be well educated so they can be independent from their parents.

“I think they’d get forced to find a job. They want to prepare their daughters so when she gets married and leave the family, she can take care of herself and her family, (work) prepares them physically, mentally, academically- every aspect of life so when they enter another family they’d be happy. Guys are alright they’d stay in the family; guys muck around and don’t take things too serious, like even if the girl doesn’t marry and goes out into the world she can stand on her own two feet. With guys they don’t really care and they can go anywhere but that’s guys but if it’s your daughter ... you’d probably love them more (laughs) and want the best for them” (PM6)

This point was developed by another female participant (PF3) using the analogy of ‘starting a new chapter’ to describe the action of moving away from home and starting a new family. PF3 felt that she could not take the step of getting married until she was sure her parents and family were secure. She did not want her responsibilities to her own (natal) family to be a burden to her new family:

“Because growing up as a Tongan, my number one priority has been the family, and girls always been taught that you cannot form anything outside the home (starting own family) unless your foundation like your home (immediate family) is properly grounded ... we’ve learnt that we cannot open up or create another chapter unless that foundation is grounded and that’s our families. Making sure that they are okay before opening up the next door because you will just be adding (burdening) to your new home” (PF3)

A third female participant (PF12) stressed that while it was true that males had responsibility as the leaders in the family she saw this as being balanced by the freedom males had to do whatever they wanted – which was not the case for females. She said:

“I think (Tongan) boys still have that freedom to do whatever they want, even before uni and when they come back- it’s there. Whereas for girls like myself you are still expected in the Tongan way to go uni and you still come back to that cycle. I don’t think boys ever come close to what Tongan girls experience with that transition out of uni” (PF12)

PF12 outlined some of the constraints she had felt when she had graduated and returned to live at home after the freedom of university study. Clearly taking her place within the family and the cultural expectations she had experienced had not been easy. University life had been a time of freedom and a break from parent’s surveillance especially.

All participants mentioned that whilst at University, many students had begun engaging in alcohol and substance abuse with one likening university life to her OE (overseas experience):

“You know you’re just there to study but at the same time you can do all these fun things like go out and party hard, it’s kind of like an OE but just in uni (laughs) you know meeting and getting to know different people” (PF7)

University life had been PF7’s opportunity to explore ‘worldly things’ that would have been prohibited in her own Tongan home. In returning home, she had had to become ‘the obedient Tongan child’ again.

## **Part One: The Journey to Employment**

Question one asked “what were the post-graduation experiences of this group of students? As seen in Table two, three of this group had gone directly into employment following graduation and their experiences are discussed first. Those of the seven who had taken longer to secure a job are discussed next, followed by the views of the two who were unemployed at the time of the study.

Of the three participants who went straight into what they described as ‘degree matching jobs’ after graduation, two (PM2 & PF3) were still in that same job at the time of this study, while PM9 had moved to another higher level post in the same career field. PM2 attributed his success in getting employment to the fact that he had networked with ‘the right people in the industry’ while he was still at high school and had maintained these contacts through his university study. He said he gained valuable work experience by watching and learning first-hand what knowledge and skills were necessary to succeed in that particular workplace. Then, from his beginnings as a freelance journalist he had progressed to a more permanent and higher level role in the company. He said:

“At the time I was still staying in touch because I’d known them through the little work experience I did before at High School and I just kept in touch and I went to the Pacific media conferences, you know I just showed my face, saw our producer and said ‘hi any work? Can I come and sit in the office quietly and watch you guys work?’ You know for me that was like getting out there and showing you want to work” (PM2)

PM2 was clearly passionate about his job: it gave him the chance to use his interests, hobbies and skills:

“Oh man like I said I’m just really grateful and lucky to get the opportunity to do what I love and get paid for it, I love it and its meeting great people every day we have something new and you’re a part of what everyone is talking about and that’s what I like” (PM2)

The second of this group (PF3 ) described how as part of her university course she had been placed at an engineering firm for her practicum. Then, when she had graduated, that firm had offered her a full time position and she was now their junior accountant:

“... I’ve been working for an engineering company out in Manukau and I do contract admin- that’s where I went and did my intern... I manage revenue and I report it back to our clients ... I did that, and then they offered me a permanent position” (PF3)

In her view, her practicum work experience had increased her chances of being employed because the firm knew her work ability and they also knew she had a good knowledge of the company processes, routines and expectations. The third of this group, PM9, said he had felt ‘lucky’ because his lecturers had seen an advertisement for a paid internship at a law firm and suggested he apply. His application had been successful and in his view the internship experience he had had while he was still studying ‘starting from the bottom’ had paved his way into employment. He said:

“I was sort of an intern but getting paid in university... I got the office law firm experience, (carrying out) the office admin and junior research for the senior lawyers” (PM9)

PM9 added that the combined knowledge from his degree course, his workplace experience and the connections he had made had not only helped him secure a job, it had opened his eyes to further career options as well as the steps he would need to take to achieve these. He said:

“(at the time) I was eyeing out this job (his current job), I wanted to get there when I was still studying towards the end, and I just did not know how and when to get there (but) I also knew that the PDS (public defence services) take in a lot of the community lawyers ... So I applied to community law, I did not get it so I started to look around at community law centres that are close by, so I rang them in (a nearby city) and I was blessed” (PM9)

Working as a junior lawyer and researcher had given him the knowledge and skills to practice law which had lead on to his current role as a public defender. He gave thanks to God for this opening:

“It’s being satisfied with what your task is and what your job is because I believe God made me a lawyer for a reason and whether I fulfil that or not I probably haven’t but there’s something bigger at the end coz I still have to

work towards it and he gives me the opportunity for what he wants done”  
(PM9)

### *The Longer Journey*

The seven participants who had experienced a longer journey into employment used words like ‘really really challenging’ and ‘the darkest time in my life’ to describe their experiences. They reported an average of 2-4 months unemployment to a maximum of one year and the number of job applications made ranged from 1 to 50: one simply described ‘losing count’ of his rejection letters. There was some anger at not getting a job quickly even though they knew that the workforce had been impacted by the economic situation (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). The financial and social pressures these participants had experienced while trying to get a job had actively led them to question their own ability and the value of their tertiary education. Two of the seven had had more than one job during the years of their job search, including a range of casual work. All seven talked about the conflict they felt between just getting a job (any job) and getting one that matched their qualification and career aspirations. They said that at some time during the job search process they had decided to ‘settle for any job’ rather than experience the fear of leaving and facing unemployment again. PF11 said:

“I hate using that word (income) but I’m comfortable at where I’m at. I get good money at my job, I’m comfortable and I know I can do better ... ‘moneys rolling in’ (laughs) I know it’s not as much as I know I can get but I’m very thankful and grateful to have a job” (PF11)

Getting work, whether this was of high or low income, was something participants were thankful for. In fact, over time, staying in jobs for the financial benefits this brought had come to outweigh the prospect not only of changing jobs but also the readjustments to starting all over again,

“Ever since then I’ve been working for them and I’ve always wanted to look for other jobs but I guess I’m so comfortable because it’s like the security blanket that I don’t want to look for somewhere else, go there and it’s worse than where I am now. I’m not use to change- sort of, I can adjust to it but not easily” (PF12)

One noted the belief that getting a job had been pre-planned by God.

“I think God played the biggest role really (in getting his job). God had already planned it, he sorted it and knew straight away that I was going to get in but it

was just putting me in the situations where he was testing my character and that's what I always believed" (PM1)

At the time of the study, four of these seven were *satisfied* with their job, two were *relatively satisfied* and one registered as seriously *dissatisfied*. The four that were satisfied (PM1, PM6, PF4 and PF7) said they had taken a couple of months to a year to find a job but believed the job they found matched their degree. While PF4's job did not quite match her degree, she said this did not matter because although this was a full time job, she regarded it as 'temporary' because she was planning to return to university to 'increase my chances of getting a job as a writer'. She said:

"It was one of those 'I know I'm going to graduate soon, I need income to keep me afloat', especially my family helping them out with money, expenses and things like that. I did not want to rely on them so I wanted to be more independent and be able to study at the same time and carry on and help them at the same time if they needed help" (PF4)

PF11 and PF12 were *relatively satisfied* with the jobs they had gained despite the fact that these did not match their degrees. PF11 said she had been unemployed for four months before being hired by the customer service agency where she had worked part-time during her study years. She said her family kept pushing her to get a 'better' job which matched her degree qualification. However for the present she was satisfied because she was earning an income. PF12 also said that having a job was a safer option than looking for a new job that matched her degree. The participant (PM10) who was *dissatisfied* with his current job said:

"To be honest I'm still confused aye? Like I don't want to be a teacher" (PM10)

However, like others, he explained how the financial gains and safety of his job outweighed not only his desire to pursue a more appealing job but the risk of not having a job:

"but it's because the opportunity is right there and then I'm too scared to leave the job because I still want to keep it in the loop kind of thing so I'm practically going to work just to get paid, I don't really want to be a teacher or anything but when they offer things like contract work for two years ... (I take it)" (PM10)

The two participants who were unemployed at the time of the study had only recently completed their studies. Neither of these students was looking for a job; nor had they experienced this phenomenon:

“For me, I just want a break... a lot of rest. No, not that much rest but I think from this period- the beginning of the year. I’m thinking of taking the next couple of months off just to refresh my mind and then hopefully pick up some work ... like I said start building a career, testing the waters. Seeing if its working for me and if it is... you know that is me I guess but if it’s not then I’ve always told myself that I’m definitely going back and doing a PhD” (PM5)

PM5 said if he did not find a degree matched job he would probably return to university and ‘specialise’ thereby increasing his chances of getting a job in his field of choice. PF8, who had also finished her master’s degree a few months earlier, had just resigned from her bank job a week before our scheduled interview. She was waiting to begin PhD studies. Unlike PM5, she described her interest in enrolling in PhD study as more of a personal challenge than occupation driven.

## **Part Two: Smoothing the Journey to Employment**

The post-graduation experience has been an extremely difficult time for the majority of these participants. Most indicated a frustration directed at the universities, the way the education system generally worked and with themselves as well.

“I felt lost, to me in my mind was like I studied three years at university and yet I’ve applied for all these jobs. In those three years they’ve always told us in uni that your degree will get you a better job and to come out and look for a job and it made me feel like they said that just to get my fees and it was like a waste of my time studying because I wasn’t getting the end product that I wanted. I felt disappointed too because I knew in myself that I was capable working for someone and doing that job well but it made me question myself, my abilities whether I was able to transform the theory stuff that I learnt into practice” (PF12)

Many expressed the view that ‘universities’ had assured them that the degrees they were taking would ensure students got work. When this had not happened a number had felt a little cheated and begun to question why they chosen to take up tertiary study at all. Two had begun to wonder also if the effort they had put into their study had been worth it. For example, PM1 described his university experience as being rather contradictory. Like others, the reality of his transition out of university had been vastly different to his expectations or, to what the university had portrayed:

“...when you’re at uni they can really teach you a lot of things that automatically tells you that you’re going to get the job that’s the mentality that you’re taught at uni. But it’s not because when you get out into the real world and you deal with real people most of the people have not been educated so when you deal with that you will be judged heavily” (PM1)

PF11 described how she felt when she realised that employers wanted people who had some experience:

“To be honest (I felt) like shit .. like after all these years studying, what was the point you know? What was the point after all those years of your studying, assignments, readings all those all nighters ... I looked for a job for four months unsuccessfully I went to about three interviews got to the last stage and at the end they wanted someone with more experience ... I was disillusioned with having a degree I thought people would want me you know? I thought I could get a job just like that but it wasn't to me it was harder than I expected different” (PF11)

All told, this group appeared to have little knowledge of the way the workforce operates. Nor had their university study prepared them for this. Interesting also, is the fact that not one of the graduates even hinted that a failure to get a job might be related to their language competence or to their being part of a minority group. Few saw preparation for the workforce as something that they might have learnt in their families, or, that their parents and family may have had totally unrealistic expectations about the power of a degree today and/ or the way the workforce operated. To this group, the degree ‘would do it all’.

A small hint of a disconnection between the hopes and aspirations of parents and the actual realities of the workforce was seen in PF7s comments, that this time had been the low point in her life. She described the way her family had openly celebrated the highs of her graduation. But then, how she had begun to feel the brunt of not being able to help out (financially) the family.

She said:

“...my family were like ‘omigosh someone in my family is smart enough to graduate but then it comes to looking for work and omigosh, that was the hardest time for me, that was the lowest lowest lowest low point in my life like, you know it's different when you grieve and stuff ... my mentality was ‘man I suck I'm not providing for my family’ and it made me feel worse because my mum was the only one providing for the family ... I was just a burden sitting around at home not really helping out and I felt like I'm useless, that's the word” (PF7)

So although her degree was a significant reward she felt its value had been wasted because of her inability to find work.

## Factors Affecting

Participants outlined three main factors which they saw as influencing their post-graduation experiences. These were networking, university courses of study and what they termed 'personal reality checks'. Each is discussed.

### *Networks*

Networking was mentioned by all participants, regardless of employment status. PM1 and PF8 described their growing realisation of the importance of networking with these words:

"I think networking is the only way you're going to get into a job. Especially if you're starting out cold, it's not what you know it's who you know, that's the reality of the world. You can be the best worker that you can be but if you don't know people, if you don't talk to them you aren't going to get where you're wanting to go and that's an actual fact that applies when you come out of uni, it applies when you're in the workplace, it applies everywhere" (PM1)

"I think in most or in all sectors of the workforce it is the most important thing is networking. It's not about what you know it's about who you know. Especially in my area that is what that's about, doesn't matter if you've got A's throughout university, it's about who you know and how you can get to that job, that's what I've heard anyways. I think networking is really important because once you know someone they know how you work and promote you to some other people. It's important because it's one way of getting jobs and stuff" (PF8)

Comments indicated the participants had also come to realize the importance of 'knowing the right people' in helping get the right job. They mentioned other graduates who, in their view, had a lesser degree than them, but who had walked straight into a job because for example 'their father knows x' or, 'his sister used to work there'. They had found that while in Tonga everybody knew everybody else and were aware of social standing and reputation, this was not the case in New Zealand. PF12, compared the concept of networking to the way Tongans (and Pacific peoples) communicated. She drew attention to difficulties Tongan youth experienced when attempting to communicate with people of senior status or outside their reference group with these words:

"I think it's crucial, especially in that transition out of uni. It's crucial coz in the labour market now unemployment is so high now. It's who you know more than what you know that will get people into jobs and careers. I think networking is more difficult for Pacific Islanders just because we're not use to it. I found it hard to network with people outside the kind of people I like to

hang out with especially with older people, it's hard for me to network with them because I'm like 'I'm such a little kid trying to talk to someone more experienced and older. They probably won't even want anything to do with me coz of the age and stuff so I think it's one of the crucial things to do while you're still at uni and after" (PF12)

In adding to this, PM9 also believed other Tongan graduates had a role to play in supporting new graduates:

"It's very important. I think it's not done enough amongst Tongan P.I graduates, it needs to be done more but it probably comes down to the nature of P.Is, it's a different sort of system. Networking is pushed in New Zealand where it is kind of view differently in the Tongan culture it's kind of like if you're trying to network that would, for example there's social status and there's sort of high ranking people and there's considered low ranking people. A student who has just graduated is not as high as someone who has graduated and gotten experience so for someone who has just graduated to network and contact a person of a high and many experience can be viewed by other Tongans negatively or can be viewed like that 'look at that person trying to climb the social ladder' by contacting that person, it's a view that should be let go, done away with because it stops island graduates from networking, which is important" (PM9)

This group believe that starting early with networking and not waiting until graduation was vital:

"I think probably in your last semester, it's probably when you should start job hunting and looking at career paths and networking with possible people that can lead you into a career" (PF12)

"I would recommend it to the final year that's when you should start preparing" (PF3)

"On your last year, start working. Try and build that experience because without it that piece of paper with your name on it is going to get you nowhere" (PM10)

### *University Courses*

With the benefit of hindsight, many said they now understood that their course of study had not matched workforce requirements or ensured professions or careers. One (PM9 the lawyer) had a specialist degree and had used this qualification well. As noted, others with qualifications in Arts and Social Sciences (5) Business (3) Health (2) and Communication studies now said that if they had studied specialist areas (such as law, engineering and medicine) they would have been more certain of getting a job.

A second group of suggestions was that universities should offer internship opportunities as part of the degree programme, so students could gain work experience:

“Probably work experience. At uni they did not really have internships, I notice now that they are slowly introducing internships where you do it for six months which would be really helpful to finding a job” (PM5)

“Work placement is the best one that really helps that transition because it gives you an insight to what the working, the real work world is like, so that’s one thing I think they do really well in AUT” (PM1)

Work experience included in courses of study was a strongly made suggestion. The need for better advice on career choices during the study years also was strongly recommended:

“I think there should be a service to let you know, give you advice on studying a study where you would most likely get a better job, so students should be told if it’s hard to get a job and to do engineering” (PM6)

Could universities provide some sort of ‘post graduate support’? Such as a department at universities which connected students with jobs that were degree specific:

“Like a job, degree sort of transition job finding programme? ... I mean a (University based) programme because they’re academics and it’s different from the government, you know the social working sector, they don’t do this. It has to be academic people who know because it’s different ... Like I honestly did not know what to do with my degree but I just knew that English would get me somewhere and I’d probably eventually do a teaching degree diploma whether I got it or not but you know I had to because that was the only way I could use it, that’s it but other than that I had to go out and look for myself” (PF7)

The full importance of having ‘successful work experience’ while studying was brought home to participants when they saw this requirement listed in application forms and raised in interviews.

### *Personal Reality Checks*

For many, the post-graduation time had been a time when they had been forced to do reality checks, which they noted, should probably have started thinking about earlier and especially during their study.

“A reality check with myself (laughs) I think that, it sounds funny but I think if I was to realistically evaluate myself and actually focused on... I was more focused on the present rather than why I was there and the outcome. I did not really prepare for the outcome I just took it day by day but I think it would be to have long term goals and to actually cement your career paths earlier before you finish so that you are able to plan different from uni to home to work. I think myself, to be evaluating my plans” (PF12)

“... There has to be a shift in your mental thinking, that’s it. That shift is the key thing that I did not really pick up until later on ... That I wasn’t just a uni student because you think of being a young kid and still in school. When you go out into the real world, especially if it’s your first year that’s how they will

see you. When you say to yourself 'nah I'm an adult, I can handle this, I'm ready to deal with all these things, that's when you can really get through" (PM1)

They explained the need to really know where you are wanting to get to and then planning your journey to that goal:

"(at the time) I was eyeing out this job (his current job), I wanted to get there when I was still studying towards the end, and I just did not know how and when to get there (but) I also knew that the PDS (public defence services) take in a lot of the community lawyers ... So I applied to community law, I did not get it so I started to look around at community law centres that are close by, so I rang them in (a nearby city) and I was blessed" (PM9)

### **Part Three: The Quarter Life Crisis**

As expected, the QLC was a new concept to all participants. In this part of the *talanoa*, I began by explaining the QLC model and then opened up the discussion for questions. Based on the assumption that the *anga faka-Tonga* played an important part in these participants' lives, I concluded this part of the *Talanoa* by asking them whether the *anga faka-Tonga* had been a challenge or enabler.

While this was the first time most had thought about their post-graduation experiences in terms of a QLC participant, some said that while there were differences in the Tongan experience, there were also some commonalities. Some expressed a feeling of relief that they were 'not alone' in these feelings.

"Yes! I thought I was like losing my mind. Yes! Ok there are others like that. That's why I was like 'Should I say this?' or would I come out and they'll be like 'you got issues'" (PM5)

PM10 said that as in the QLC, he had experienced a feeling of being lost after years in formal education.

"Yes and it is true because when you go through all that education to finally realise that that's what you've been doing your whole life and applying that into reality ... you wouldn't know where to start. If you can't start then you're just going to be lost for the rest of your life" (PM10)

PF11 identified with the feelings of losing confidence in herself and, in her degree. She said after months of not being able to find work she had to fight her feelings of doubt in her own abilities.

She said:

“... a lot of obstacles that I (went through), like not only trying to find myself but (also) my confidence, it shattered me that I couldn't find a job ... this was an all-time lowest for me looking for a job after uni ... putting a strong front to my family ... and trying to not let them see what turmoil that was inside me, it was like the unknown and not knowing what was going to happen” (PF11)

PF11 identified with the feelings of being 'not quite children' and yet not quite adult either. As in the life stages model he saw marriage as a marker of adulthood:

“I think because I consider myself a big kid because I don't have massive responsibilities, I'm not married I don't have kids and I socialise a lot. My life is family, work and socialising, it's hard because for me I think it's when you get married and have kids that is when you stop being a kid coz when you're single you're like half adult (laughs). So for me anyways I'm half adult half kid” (PF11)

A significant aspect of the QLC is the inability of young people to feel satisfied with the realistic opportunities offered in life:

“Yep, I think I did go through a QLC. I think I still am, even though I'm working I think I still am experiencing it, like I'm not satisfied” (PF12)

However, although some admitted to experiencing certain aspects of the QLC, they felt these were less severe than those outlined by Robbin and Wilner (2001). PM5 describes his experience,

“To be honest, I'm trying to think of the severity of it, I do think I've been dropped coming out of the master's programme but I do think I've just been thrust out like here you are, you've got your masters, you know it's you now, you go and apply for jobs so in that case I do think I've been dropped. I'm trying to think if it's made me bad, if it has impacted on me a bit. I think it has but probably not to the severity where you know where I'm losing my mind constantly you know I'm stressing over it maybe because I've just finished my masters and relaxing. I can only talk for the Tongans I know and I think the Tongans I know are kind of in the same boat as me. It's there, where we've been dropped into this unknown but the severity is not that much because me and my other Tongan friends at university have got that support network” (PM5)

PF8 however suggested that the severity of frustration was likely to increase with time:

“I think the QLC hits even more the further away it is from when you graduate. So if you get someone who graduated two years ago, I think it hits them more than those who have just finished. Like I said before I still experience it, it's so ... it's such an awakening feeling after you've just explained that like 'aah now I get it'”(PF8)

On the Matter of 'when does it end?' PF3 and PM10 noted that even though they were in full time employment, they described their graduate experiences as 'still confusing'. They said:

"To be honest I'm still confused aye? like I don't want to be a teacher but it's because the opportunity is right there and then I'm too scared to leave the job because I still want to keep it in the loop kind of thing so I'm practically going to work just to get paid, I don't really want to be a teacher or anything but when they offer things like work" (PM10)

"I would say it was the timing. Although I've had the smooth transition it's not always going to last. Even though this is more than what you expected coming out of uni, straight into a job, getting paid a fair amount but is this really me?" (PM3)

### *The anga faka-Tonga: A Challenge or Enabler?*

As noted, the central pillars of the *anga faka-Tonga* are Creator God, the family and the use of services for the good of all – present to future. Most of this group shared that their families had played a key role in their education and the completion of their degrees. However, with that attention came expectations and pressure to succeed academically and, also financial pressures. Almost half of the participants said that the support of their family had certainly lightened their post-graduation experience both in terms of financial and moral support. PM6 and PM1 described family in this way:

"It has a good influence, the family support, and the spiritual support. They value the family and spiritual support with Tongans, it's a big help in the middle of the QLC" (PM6)

"I think how I communicate to my family really helps me get through my transition because they keep me humble. My family keeps me sane, keeps me grounded and makes me not get ahead of myself too much but it encourages me to do the right things" (PM1)

PM9 and PF11 had said their experiences had been positive because of their faith and religion. Their Christian faith and reliance on God had given them direction and a sense of satisfaction as they believed all were given purpose through their jobs and strength through their prayers.

"I think if I did not have that I would be stressed and I'll be frustrated, I probably wouldn't get the opportunity I got coz I think a lot of the stress is not being satisfied with what God has given you to do, what God's purpose is for you to do in this life" (PM9)

"I did grow up in the church and I went to Sunday School and my dad gave me this one advice he said if you don't go to church, as long as you know God

and you do a little lotu lilo (every now and then, don't ever forget that he is there and I think that's what kind of got me through my dark times is that I remembered you know... like I reignited my relationship with God and my teachings from Bible School, like in your hard times he will always be there for you and he'll always support you through anything, that was what was important for me at that time in life" (PF11)

On the less positive side, four stated that the Tongan cultural ways such as church obligations and *fua kavenga* had added significantly to 'negative' post-graduation experience:

"Tongan culture made it worse, (it) just made it worse because you come from a traditional Tongan family and especially if you're from a religious family there's always things at church that you have to help provide for and when you're disabled, not so much disabled but you don't have a job to help out. There's just more pressure with it, it's just like (sigh) makes things worse because you're not able to help and then there's your church family who are always like 'oh so she can't help out' so the pressures on that, all eyes are on you. You finish a degree but you can't get a damn job like you know people are just like (that)" (PF7)

"... Pressured to help out around home because you know when you're at uni they put you there to get a good education to find a good job so I felt the pressure to look for a job" (PM10)

"... Major part of our culture, it made things worse because it adds to the pressure of having to make sure to provide for the family, knowing that could have added to my stress that would make the QLC feel a bit worse coz I have extra things to worry about" (PF8)

"(Culture) makes you more depressed. Honestly, I think culture does especially your parents. They work and they come back 'do you have a job yet?', 'do you have an interview yet?', 'have you applied for jobs yet?' and it's hard for them to understand that there is a process like honestly they think it's like that \*clicks fingers\* and we get it. Actually I think they make it worse even though they don't mean it and they don't know it but they do" (PF12)

## **Summary**

These and other comments indicate the hard realities graduates experienced when they left university. After years of job reassurances post university they had never really imagined or considered the realities after graduation. Up until this time many of their lives had been charted through education, going from primary school to secondary through to university. The challenges they described had not only had significant impact financially but there were also emotional and psychological repercussions during their transitions. Feelings discussed included uselessness, challenging their attitudes to education, their abilities after studying, as well as their attitudes to life in general. As they had associated degree with guaranteed job and being able to financially support oneself as well as their families, these desires were something graduates were hoping to accomplish with a job. In being unable to find employment after graduation let alone any job that would gain income and financial independence it was evident that it affected their psychological and emotional wellbeing.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

This discussion chapter is in three parts that are in line with the research questions of: what were the experiences of Tongan graduates after graduation? How can a smooth transition into the workforce be achieved? And third, how do their experiences align with the Quarter Life Crisis (QLC)? As noted, research questions one and two focused directly on graduate's experiences. However, for question three graduates reviewed their own experiences against the human development concept of QLC. Therefore that part of the *talanoa* was more a reflective type discussion. The chapter begins with a brief review of how the participants valued education.

#### The value of education

These Tongan graduates had internalized the global view of that there is a necessary relationship between tertiary study and employment, as outlined in OECD and TEC reports (see Chapter Two) and which also underpins the QLC model. However while employment had become a main concern, they also valued education and tertiary education especially through a Tongan cultural lens - as the way to contribute to family and community good. This fits earlier research by Kalavite (2010) and Faleolo (2012) as well as the Tongan priority to education seen in the number of graduates per capita. To these participants, education was not solely for employment and meant more than just being degree'd – a slang term used by participants. Education was the process which transformed people from *vale* (ignorant) to gaining the *'ilo* (knowledge) and *poto* (skills) (Māhina, 2008) which would enable them to fulfil their social and cultural responsibilities. Education taught *mo'ui fakapotopoto* (sustainable living) (Johansson-Fua et al., 2007), the fundamental importance of maintaining a balance between one's social, physical and spiritual life (Tuitahi, 2005) how to use resources wisely so as to ensure sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families thereby as Mahina (2008) notes to live socially conscious lives.

The study confirmed also the way education had become a major means of achieving status in the Tongan social systems - where status was ascribed through birth and the division between royal and non-royal status was strictly observed. Education was the pathway by which people in

the commoners' category could raise to the levels of the elite as seen in Figure 1. These participants described how education actually set 'educated' families apart from those families that did not have educated members. They were also well aware of the inevitable 'labeling' of their family and peers which would have taken place following their graduation. Education definitely was a strategic move that gave families the chance for a prosperous future as described by Cowling (2002).

### **What are the Tongan graduate experiences after graduation?**

Answers to question one reinforced very compellingly that the post graduate experience for the majority of these students had been quite traumatic. The stories which saw education as leading to a better life for Pacific peoples in New Zealand had not been the reality for these participants and their transition out of university into the workforce had not been as straight forward and smooth as they had hoped. As reported, participants averaged 2-4 months unemployment to a maximum of one year and a range in the number of job applications from 1 to 50. Some expressed an anger and frustration at their inability to find employment and for others this had brought a sense of failure that they were not using their degrees to 'give back to their families.' Notably all expressed a desire to honour their parents' investment in education and of trying to ensure their parents' sacrifices had not been in vain. There was also a feeling that parents did not really understand why their graduate children could not get jobs, especially when their children had had so many better chances than they had had. Of interest, was that no graduate mentioned their being from a minority ethnic group, or their own English competence as impacting on their job seeking success. This is an area which warrants further study.

In telling their stories, this group displayed considerable resilience in their high tolerance for unemployment and their willingness to take any kind of work they could find or unmatched degree to work so as to support the family quality of life. Although it was not probed in depth and perhaps is the subject for further study, it was found that only two of the participants had ever received governmental assistance through the unemployment benefit.

A second group of challenges, related to these graduates having to step out of a highly programmed formal education system where decisions had been made for them, into the 'real world' where they must now fend for themselves (Robbin & Wilner, 2001). They had found that life outside university had no resemblance to the educational rewards they had expected and, which had been highlighted by their parents and teachers or their expectations of a smooth passage from tertiary study and into work. Participants described the stark contrast between being 'catered to' in their lectures and their university accommodation to the lonely reality of trying to break into the workforce (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). In addition, the constant (although unsaid) reminders of their parents' migration struggles proved debilitating when the hoped for goals and unsaid expectations had not been reached.

Other challenges related to their cultural expectations. Being home was 'good' however, university life had been a time of freedom and a break from their parent's surveillance. This was evident for the younger participants especially. For example some had begun engaging in alcohol and substance abuse with one likening university life to her OE (Overseas Experience): her opportunity to explore 'worldly things' that would have been prohibited in her own Tongan home. Graduation had meant giving up (and tempering) these habits and becoming 'the obedient Tongan child' again. In addition not having a job had made them financially reliant on their parents (and siblings) again after being independent for so many years (see Fadjukoff et al., 2007) and 'stunted' the level and nature of their social engagement. As with other cultures that takes pride in the strength of the family and social connectedness, people belonging to the same *kāinga* (kin group) share and both the joy of celebratory occasions and, the failures.

Participants avoiding social contact had become the way to escape the judgmental gaze of community members. Most expressed an unwillingness to participate in social events especially those which required a financial expenditure 'which my family can't afford'. There was also a sadness at not being able to contribute to the family *fua kavenga* – the customary obligations families engage in relating to family, church and community; which nurture the bonds within and between families, similar to the Samoan concept of *fa'alavelave* (see Mageo, 1991). Participants shared their dawning realization also that success in higher education had effectively separated them from those who had not had this chance. One described taking a 'lesser' job' as, 'unbefitting'

to the efforts made to get a degree and the standard of his/her qualification. Mention was also made that they felt people were beginning to view them in the same category as those who did not have degrees. This had been a blow to their egos.

An unexpected finding, and warranting further research, was the way these negative post-graduation experiences had served to blunt or diminish graduates' career hopes and aspirations. A significant number had been unprepared for the challenges they might face and their lack of success in the early post-graduation days had brought feelings of fear wherein they had taken the safety option of 'settling for 'less' and staying in those posts – which was 'better than having no job'. Based on this, it can be said that almost three quarters of this group had not had the opportunity to apply or test their knowledge and skills in employment and in doing so to move to higher decision making posts.

This represents a wastage or under-use of the tremendous national human resource which graduates represent. The New Zealand government is making a tremendous investment in an education system that for many graduates is not having successful outcomes. In sum significant numbers of students may be completing a tertiary qualification that will not guarantee them employment.

### **Smoothing the graduate transition to the workforce**

The majority of these participants (and their parents) held unrealistic expectations of the returns to be gained from tertiary study and little practical knowledge of the way the workforce they were about to enter, operated. The comment by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (2010) that many Pacific students 'understand the labour market and are choosing their area of study accordingly' was not true for this group.

Participants saw tertiary institutions as having a responsibility to support graduates' transition into the workforce especially in giving them experience in the ways the workforce is organized, the implementation of networking, work experience included in courses and encouraging the art of reflecting on experiences. It is likely that the ideas they suggested are important for the minority students, such as Pacific and Tongan students. With the benefit of hindsight, many said their

course of study had not matched the workforce requirements or ensured professions or careers. Whilst there may have been mismatch of degree and workforce demand (Schomburg & Teichler, 2006) it may also be that this group had little experience in visioning or tailoring the skills they had to the ways job descriptions were advertised. Whether they were applying for the wrong jobs is another point warranting further study. It was unclear how participants had chosen their courses of study although this seemed to be more by interest than career focus - which aligns with the Graduate Longitudinal Study New Zealand (2012).

Participants noted that parents' preferences were for them to take medical and legal studies for the status and high esteem in which these were held and, the financial returns. Apart from this, parental involvement seemed to have been minimal. Instead they had entrusted this vital choice to their children. Was this because they believed their children had more understanding of the tertiary system than they did or because parents did not have the time to discuss this with their children? Upon reflection, this group had come to realise the importance of secondary school choices in setting the secure knowledge bases for university study including entry pre-requisites as well. While in some cases teachers had provided this guidance and assisted bridging the transitions of students into university (Joyce, 2013b) there was still a need for a place where students could learn the skills to understand and transition into a workforce which was continually changing.

Participants considered that having work experience included in their tertiary course of study was a priority. This supports Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, and Cragolini's (2004) research that work experience provides a realistic look at how the professional world functions and gives hands on preparation for the reality of the work force. The full extent of having had 'successful work experience' has been brought home when participants saw this requirement listed in application forms and, raised in interviews.

Finally participants had learnt the importance of networking: that knowing the right people could facilitate getting the right job and this was not solely dependent on having a degree. They now understood that while everybody knew everybody in Tonga and were aware of social standing and reputation this was not the case in New Zealand. It was clear that these participants did not

have the interpersonal or family based contacts, which would have either facilitated them into a job or at least alerted them even when small jobs with a potential future came up unexpectedly. This supports Crebert et al., (2004) that networking gives graduates an advantage with employees. For the future, participants saw university as the ideal time to foster networking opportunities rather than wait until degrees were completed. Networking was a way to maintain professional links and build relationships after study ended, and ensure access to people in work roles which related to their own qualifications.

### **Did these Tongan graduates experience the QLC?**

Most of these participants had experienced a situation similar to that described in the QLC. These include a sense of disillusionment ranging from confusion to outright anger, overwhelming feelings of worthlessness to depression (Robbin & Wilner, 2001) and believing they had been cheated by the system. They spoke about the embarrassment in having to seek assistance (especially from younger siblings) and feeling they had let their parents down and, of being degree'd yet treated as "nothing" because they could not get a job.

To discuss question three, I took three points from the QLC concept (individual journey, transitioning time into adulthood and, a time of trial and error (learning time) and for chasing their dreams) and critiqued these against participants' views (see Table 3 in overleaf).

Table 3

***The QLC and Tongan graduate experiences***

QLC	TONGAN GRADUATES
1. Individual journey	An extended family journey
2. Transitioning time into adulthood	Adulthood defined by culturally prescribed roles and tasks eg. Marriage and first <i>failotu</i> (liturgy)
3. A time of trial and error (learning time) and for chasing their dreams	A time of moving back into the family and taking on the role of 'the Tongan child' again - wherein roles and expectations are defined by social norms of rank and gender. Decisions, are made by and within the family, based on what is good (socially, spiritually, economically) for the family

Source: Robbin, A., & Wilner, A. (2001). *Quarter life crisis: The unique challenges of life in your twenties*. New York, NY: Tarcher/ Putnam.

As in point one, in the QLC concept, development is viewed as an individual journey. These participants viewed their life journey as a shared one and associated with family status, esteem and identity. In the *anga faka-Tonga*, the extended family was the prime organizational unit (see Chapter Three). Graduations, which were a marker of knowledge gained, were celebrated by all, as were disappointments. Participants described how families pooled their resources to ensure the basic needs of all were met – e.g. spiritual, social or financial. If a member was unemployed others would make up for any financial hiccups until they got a job. Meantime, there were many other ways graduates supported the family e.g. house hold duties, picking up and delivering family members to school and work and, church duties.

In discussions about the concept of adulthood and the associated markers (point 2) participants said there was not really a concept of 'adulthood' in the Tongan family. Instead, every family member from young to old age used their resources to support the family good. Their 'place' was family rather than age based or task based. Participants did not define adulthood as achieving certain tasks such as marriage, a job or as synonymous with independent behaviours such as owning a house, living away from home as described by Fadjukoff et al., (2007). Some used the word maturity to describe this: maturity was demonstrated by actions such as 'thinking outside

the box,' knowing right from wrong (as Steinburg & Cuffman, 1996) and using *the 'ilo* (knowledge) and the *poto* (skills) gained through education to lead a life that was less *vale* (ignorant) (Māhina, 2008). Being able to perform the liturgy service at church was another marker of maturity. Running a liturgy service is an important aspect of the Wesleyan and Methodist church. Taking on the responsibility of running a Sunday morning or mid-week service signified that the person is taking on a church and spiritual role with responsibilities and sacrifices.

Two said their post-graduation experience had been nothing like the QLC because their Christian faith had brought stability to their lives. They said they had firsthand experience of the pressures of being Christian as well as being a young person living in New Zealand today. A Christian life incorporated discipline, tradition and living by the commandments and principles of life shared through the Bible. They said everybody has a purpose in life which was revealed in their relationship of prayer and meditation with God. So, in the Tongan family based systems, the QLC markers of getting a job and/ or marriage and having children were not markers of adulthood. These graduates said they were and would always be part of these families with all the benefits, challengers and enablers this implied.

Point three of the QLC – that this is a time of trial and error (learning time) and for chasing dreams was probably the one which participants reflected most deeply on. This was seen to be very different to the way Tongans organise because in the *anga faka-Tonga*, education is perceived as an investment for families. After graduation it was an expectation of the graduates to move back and /or stay within the family home and, contribute to the family. Most unmarried young people remain a part of their parent's household until marriage to prevent pre-marital sex - an important element to the Christian faith as well as the Tongan culture (Gailey, 1996). As noted in Chapter Three, each member had their ascribed gendered roles which might vary accordingly to each family.

#### *Anga faka-Tonga – challenges and enablers*

Participants viewed the *anga faka-Tonga* cultural beliefs and expectations as both a challenge and an enabler in their post-graduation experience. Being Tongan had undoubtedly cushioned

the pressure of being unemployed. However in some cases this had also brought increased anxieties. While all enjoyed the support of and the benefits of being part of their extended family, they also missed the independence they had enjoyed at university and the opportunities to explore new challenges freely without being under the surveillance of their parents and community.

Education and university life had also challenged the traditional gendered roles. Almost half of the participants believed it was more important for males to find work than females, as males were traditionally the future leaders responsible for the family welfare in a Tongan patriarchal society (see Stevens, 1996). However, they acknowledged that in today's monetized economy female graduates were now expected to take on more responsibility for family wellbeing. One view was that having a job was equally important for females if they married because this would give them some independence when they lived away from their parents (see also Marcus, 1975). Two female Tongan participants described how they had been allowed to move away from home to attend university, which would probably not have been permitted in the past or, in Tonga. However, because they were not married by graduation, they had moved back to the care of their parents who would provide for their security and safety.

For these participants the QLC discussion stirred many reflections as they looked back on their experiences, their harsh feelings in adjusting to their job search, and their feelings of ineptness after struggling in this process. They displayed some QLC symptoms as described in the literature, however the extent in which they had experienced this was likely not as severe as described by Robbin and Wilner (2001). To conclude, it can be said that Tongan graduates, like western and mainstream graduates, are vulnerable to the concept of QLC.

Documentation on the QLC concept provides no clear indications as to when these symptoms are most likely to subside (Robbin & Wilner, 2001); these participants said their feelings of disillusionment would subside after getting work. They said that for the present and believing in a higher purpose from God they were able to accept their present situation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

This exploratory study has provided valuable insights into the experiences of Tongan graduates in their immediate post-graduation period. While this group were well qualified they had difficulties finding employment in a labour market which was rapidly changing and also in adjusting to life outside of the structured formal schooling systems they had been in for so many years. As seen, on the one hand the *anga faka-Tonga* and family system had protected these participants from the more severe experiences which are associated with the QLC, but it had also added other pressures. This chapter presents the main points arising from the study, and concludes with recommendations for further research.

#### **Value of education is economic and social**

Gaining a tertiary qualification meant more than just getting a job for these participants. Even though they understood the economic advantages of having a degree they also saw this as helping them fulfil their cultural roles e.g. to ensure the good of the family and community. In sum the high valuing of education was not only for economic purposes, education had become an intricate part of their social and cultural being and an avenue to family esteem, status and identity.

#### **Post graduate experience**

The main findings were that completing their degrees had not guaranteed these participants a job. This situation fits the national data that the number of unemployed graduates is increasing (see Chapter One) and is a significant contrast to earlier years when it was mainly unskilled people in this category. The struggle these participants experienced in trying to find employment was an additional blow to them, because they understood very well the high expectations held by their families - that migration to New Zealand would achieve a better life. Many had 'settled for a lesser job' than their degree warranted and had remained there rather than go through the whole fearful process of looking for another job. While this blunting of aspirations was a personal issue for these graduates, their families and communities, the wastage or underuse of human resources

this signifies is a serious national issue. As noted, there is tremendous government investment in tertiary education and there is a relationship between education and national development.

### **Smoothing the transition**

A number of valuable suggestions were made by which to smooth the graduate transition into the labour force including: course selection, the inclusion of internships or work experience in university courses of study, and support in building professional networks. Building a knowledge and understanding about the way the workforce operated was also strongly recommended as was the importance of including parents and families in this learning, especially with respect to parent's expectations.

### **Challenges and Enablers and the QLC**

The family system and the *anga faka-Tonga* constituted a protective element but also a challenge to these graduates. Clearly participants were disheartened when they could not fulfil the responsibilities to their families as in the *anga faka-Tonga*. It can be said that for these participants, the QLC was more associated with their not being able to fulfil their social roles rather than with their individual achievement. In addition adulthood or maturity was not defined in terms of markers such as marriage, getting a job, or buying a house. This was described in terms of fulfilling their social, cultural and spiritual responsibilities.

### **Who can use the findings?**

The study findings have value for many agencies and organisations both nationally and internationally. First, the data will be useful for tertiary institutions as they seek to better their services and programmes for Pacific students and other ethnic minority groups. Second, findings are of interest to educational planners, such as the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). As noted, the New Zealand government is investing over four billion dollars a year on tertiary education and much of this is directed to affirmative actions to increase the educational achievement of Pacific and Maori students. These findings will contribute

to the ongoing assessment of what interventions are working and which are not, and what can be done to improve graduate services for Pacific and other minority group graduates.

By reviewing these post-graduation journeys through the QLC lens, the study has also presented a different picture of these experiences – distinct from that seen in the data which for example, details numbers of graduates unemployed. This study highlights some of the *personal* challenges and costs in the post-graduation journey, which in turn raise questions about how these issues can be addressed. Clearly for these Tongan graduates, their experience was physically and mentally stressful.

### **Limitation of the research**

This was an exploratory study. The 12 participants were Auckland based Tongan graduates drawn from three universities. While some of the findings may reflect the experiences of other Tongan or Pacific graduates in New Zealand, findings are only applicable to this study and this group of participants.

### ***Talanoa***

The use of *talanoa* was culturally appropriate for the research as the participants were of Tongan descent and understood the Tongan language and the *anga faka-Tonga*. The *talanoa* allowed for in-depth conversations and responsiveness to body language and cues. A disadvantage in the use of *talanoa* was that the excitement of participants in discussing their experiences led to the *talanoa* being extended beyond the allocated times. However the *talanoa* method was appropriate and fitting for the group of participants as well as the purpose of the research.

### **Future research**

This was an exploratory study of the experiences of Tongan graduates after graduation, documenting their transitions out of university and into the “real world”. Suggestions for future research include:

1. Did the Tongan graduates' ethnicity or English language competency influence their employment search?
2. Are Tongan (and Pacific) graduates 'settling into any job' after graduation? If so, what are the personal, community and national implications of this?
3. How are Pacific university students making career choices and what factors influence these?

#### Final comment

Thank you to the participants for your willingness to participate in this study, because of you this research was made possible. *Mālō 'aupito.*

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## **APPENDIX 1: Question Guide**

### Background:

Age, ethnicity, birthplace, university attended, degree programme, time of completion, why they chose to study their programme choice, aspirations before entering university, family education history (family education culture- if it is highly valued).

Where now? (employment or other)

### Cultural Aspect

What cultural aspects have influenced your university and post graduate experiences?

Purpose? Job opportunities? Who influenced you? Do you think boys and girls experience it differently? In what way?

### After university:

What did you do after university? (What was your next step?)

What is your idea of a perfect transition into your next steps after university?

How has it been like for you since leaving university?

Do you think it's like this for all Tongans?

Is it easier for males/females?

What do you suggest others do to prepare themselves for life after university?

### Good things after university:

What were 3 good things that happened after university?

What happened?

How did you feel?

Do you think it's the same for all Tongans?

### Not so good things after university:

What were 3 good things that happened after university?

What happened?

How did you feel?

Do you think it's the same for all Tongans?

### University perception:

Did anyone or any course prepare you for post-graduation?

Do you think it could have been better? (Or different and why?)

Who do you think should prepare university students for post-graduation?

Do you think co-op education is a good idea of preparing university students for what comes after their degrees?

Do you think it's the same for all Tongan graduates? (or for Pacific)

### The QLC:

(After explaining a little about QLC to the participants I will then have follow up questions)

Do you think you experienced a QLC? (Yes or no, explain)

Reflecting back on your university experiences, why do you think graduates would end up feeling and experiencing QLC?

Do you think Tongans could possibly experience this? (Why and how).

Do you think the Tongan culture was a + or – to QLC?

Looking back, do you think it was useful/ valuable getting a degree? Explain.

## APPENDIX 2a: Ethics Approval



A U T E C  
S E C R E T A R I A T

22 November 2012

Peggy Faribairn-Dunlop  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Peggy

Re Ethics Application: **12/295 To explore the concept of quarter life crisis and its applicability to the experiences of Tongan graduates in New Zealand today.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 22 November 2015.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 22 November 2015;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 22 November 2015 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. If your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply there.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

All the very best with your research,

Dr Rosemary Godbold  
Executive Secretary  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Sela Tu'uholo Pole [sela.pole@gmail.com](mailto:sela.pole@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX 2b: Participant information

# Participant Information Sheet



### Date Information Sheet Produced:

05/10/2012

### Project Title

To explore the concept of Quarter Life Crisis (QLC) and its applicability to the experiences of Tongan graduates in New Zealand today.

### An Invitation

Malo e lelei, my name is Sela Pole and I am inviting you to participate in my Masters research on Quarter life crisis. The QLC is a concept introduced by Robbin and Wilner (2001) to describe the period between graduates completing their studies and making their place in the world. This study will contribute to my thesis completion of a Master's degree in Philosophy.

The purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of Tongan graduates in the time period after graduation - for example when they transition from many years in formal education and into the work force. The information from my thesis will highlight both the challenges and enablers to support Tongan graduates' experiences (positive and negative) in bridging the post- graduation and workplace transition. In doing this study I hope to draw awareness of the strategies which could be put in place to smooth this transition by government, community groups and families.

Your participation is voluntary and you may wish to withdraw at any time of the research.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Your name and contact details were suggested to me by another graduate as someone who might be interested in sharing your post-graduation experiences. You were identified because you are Tongan and have graduated from a university.

### What will happen in this research?

The individual interviews will take approximately an hour. You will be given a consent form to fill prior to the interview. A time and place will then be organised for the interview to your convenience.

### What are the discomforts and risks?

There is always a risk of identity exposure in any small demographic and minority group research. Risks will be alleviated by the exclusion of personal details in the research document such as your name and any identifiable social groups you belong to.

### How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, there is a chance you may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions. If during the interview you feel uncomfortable with answering any question, there is no problem with you declining the question (s) or leaving the interview at any time. AUT contacts are provided below.

<http://www.aut.ac.nz/being-a-student/current-post-graduates/your-health-and-wellbeing/counselling> or call +64 9 921 9992 (City Campus) or +64 9 921 9998 (North Shore Campus).

I will also refrain from engaging in any casual conversation in relation to interviews or interview materials and make sure interviews are not overheard in any way.

### **What are the benefits?**

Quarter life crisis is a relatively new concept. This area of research to date is predominately based in the United States on white demographics. This research will contribute immensely to the QLC knowledge base of minority group experiences. This will also open avenues of exploration in the transitions of Tongan graduates out of University and into the "real world".

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Your privacy will be protected by excluding your name and any association with church, social or organisation groups from this research. I will not engage in any conversation in relation to interviews or interview material and take care to ensure that the interviews are not overheard in any way.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The cost of your participation in this research will be your time. I will try to alleviate any costs to you by organising an available time and place that is convenient to you.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

From the time you receive this information sheet. I will be contacting you in a week time to confirm if you agree to participate in the research.

### **How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you agree to participate in the research, a date, time and place will be organised. You will then be given a consent form to sign before the interview.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes. You will be given a transcript of our interview for your approval and the summary findings after the research will be available if requested.

### **What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Peggy Fairbairn- Dunlop, [peggy.fairbairn-dunlop@aut.ac.nz](mailto:peggy.fairbairn-dunlop@aut.ac.nz), (09) 921 999 ext 6203

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6902.

### **Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

**Researcher Contact Details:** Sela Pole [sela.pole@gmail.com](mailto:sela.pole@gmail.com) phone: 021 023 30908

### **Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Tagaloatele Professor Peggy Fairbairn- Dunlop  
Manukau Campus  
AUT University  
Private Bag 92006

Auckland 1142, New Zealand  
Tel: 64 9 921 9999 x 6203

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012*,  
AUTEC Reference number *12/295*.**

APPENDIX 2c: Consent Form

# Consent Form



*Project title: To explore the concept of Quarter Life Crisis and its applicability to the experiences of Tongan graduates in New Zealand today.*

*Project Supervisor: Professor Peggy Fairbairn- Dunlop*

*Researcher: Sela Pole*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mmmm yyyy.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):  Yes  No

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012 AUTEK Reference number 12/295**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form*

