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NAVIGATING SOCIAL STRUCTURES: THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN ADVOCACY WORK IN TONGA

by

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A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Sociology

School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Arts, Law and Education

The University of the South Pacific

December, 2018

DECLARATION

Statement by Author

I, Damien P.K.Gock, declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published, or substantially overlapping with material submitted for the award of any degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

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Statement by Supervisor

The research in this thesis was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Damien P.K. Gock

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges and strategies of advocacy by women's rights activists in Tonga. Drawing on feminist standpoint methodology and the use of the Kakala Framework's concept of talanoa, the study is based on in-depth interviews with Tongan women's rights activists. It was found that religion, culture and the socio-political landscape in which NGOs and CSOs find themselves were major sources of hinderance to their work. Women activists in Tonga answer these challenges through their relationships with the national government; the use of new information and communication technologies; and involvement with the Tongan churches, to name a few. However, major challenges to shaping advocacy persist due to apprehensive perceptions and attitudes toward women's rights advocacy work in Tonga. As a result, people's reception of ideas related to women's rights issues and principles continue to be resisted.

Abbreviations

CEDAW- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CR- Consciousness-raising

CSFT- Civil Society Forum of Tonga

CSO- Civil Society Organizations

CWL- Catholic Women's League

IPPF- International Planned Parenthood Federation

NGO- Non-Government Organizations

SRHR- Sexual and Reproductive and Health Rights

STI/STD- Sexually Transmitted Infections/ Sexually Transmitted Diseases

TFHA- Tonga Family Health Association

UN- United Nations

UNGA- United Nations General Assembly

UNHRC- United Nations Human Rights Council

UNRISD- United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

UPR- Universal Periodic Review

VAW- Violence Against Women

WAD- Women's Affairs Division

WCCC- Women's and Children's Crisis Centre

WIDE- Women in Development Europe

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

According to the preamble in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),[1] human rights encompass a range of fundamental principles upholding the dignity and worth of a human being, both men and women, to promote social progress, freedom and better social standards.[2] Women's rights are- in the Beijing Platform for Action-[3]human rights. Consequently, women's involvement in social, economic and all other spheres of development is both necessary as a means to achieve advancement of all articles under the UDHR and as an end in and of itself. The processes by which women's rights are institutionalized in any given context is a product of complex interactions between multiple forces and actors including international treaties and documents, national constitutions, theoretical writings by academics, decisions by international and national leaders and heads of non-governmental organisations, as well as the work of activists in civil society.[4] Women's rights have been referred to as "planted flowers" in Pacific Island societies and, as they have been introduced into a locality, they gain new localized ideological and social attributes, while also retaining elements of its 'original' form.[5] This often presents challenges to managing transnational ideas that correlate to local justice theories and at the same time presenting new ideologies that challenge local inequalities.[6] When feminist ideologies cross borders, it is often in conflict with the context's construction of these new feminist ideas and also ways of understanding them. This is because there is a difference in ideological constructions and the ways in which they are presented-feminist ideologies in the face of culturally invoked ideologies- differ.

To understand human rights and its applications around the world, one must look at the cultures in which the human rights framework is applied. A common tension in the practice or application of human rights has related to apparent conflicts between principles of individual equality in human rights and cultural systems and practices

[1] UNGA, 1948.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 1996.
[4] Levitt and Merry, 2009.
[5] Ibid
[6] Ibid

that create hierarchies between groups of individuals. Just like other Polynesian countries, Tonga has a complex social hierarchy where society is stratified from the high chiefs down to the commoners. Chiefs in Tonga endorse a different code of ethics in comparison to the commoners and often create a hegemonic relationship that has been conditioned over time by observed customs of respect and servitude; this factor contributes to a politically effective division between the classes in Tonga.[7] Women's rights are as equally contentious in Tonga because of the gender-relations within its society. The myths of the first *Tu'i Tonga* illustrate the model for the social order of Tongan society that has gender distinctions at its core in the creation and transmission of mystical/secular power and authority.[8] For instance, *Kainga (*family*)* relations show that a brother pays tribute to his older sister, who has given him her powers of authority, in terms of nurture and providence. This relationship is called *Mahekitanga*. *Mahekitanga* is the female within the paternal *kainga* towards whom individuals in the *kainga* owe the greatest respect; she is usually the eldest sister of the father or father's father.[9] Since a certain group of women (the older sister) are elevated above men in this system,[10] and simultaneously violence against a wife may be justified culturally, it applying a human rights framework and women's rights framework in Tonga, requires doing significant and complex cultural and political work. In addition to this, the history of Christianity in Tonga and its own gender structures complicate further how gender relations are organised in Tongan society, thus requiring additional contextual work in applying a women's rights framework.

A case in point is when the Kingdom of Tonga came under the spotlight because of the protests against the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Only two Pacific Island Countries- Tonga and Palau- have not ratified the convention.[11] This is not to suggest that Tonga does not respect women's rights, and as a matter of fact, Tonga has made major progress under international treaty bodies when it comes to gender equality. Tonga has made serval commitments- internationally and regionally- for example to the

[7] Helu, 1999.
[8] James, 1996.
[9] Wood-Ellem, 1999.
[10] Helu, 1999.
[11] Moala, 2015.

Beijing Platform for Action, Commonwealth Platform for Action, the Harare Declaration 1991, to name a few.[12] Under their 2013 National UPR Report, Tonga is committed to eliminating gender-based violence, resulting in several country reports and the creation of a Domestic Violence Unit in 2010, the National Policy on Gender and Development in 2001 and the Reproductive Health Policy that was developed in 2008,[13] and also the Family Protection Act in 2013.[14] Furthermore, since the report was launched, Tonga has been taking steps to consider signing and ratifying CEDAW,[15] however it has not been an easy task. In March of 2015, in relation to CEDAW, Tonga's government had motioned to ratify the Convention but was opposed by the conservative majority. Importantly, while in many instances, conventions and laws to address the marginalisation of women are often supported by women, in Tonga, many of those opposing the CEDAW ratification were women themselves with a majority belonging to women's church groups. The main reason for their opposition to the Convention was the perceived contradiction to the Tongan ways of life (*fakatonga)* and their Christian Values.[16] This apparent contradiction had implications for how women's rights activists in Tonga plan and continue their advocacy work and was the starting point of this research.

This research study attempts to examine how Tongan women activists shape their advocacy in relation to societal structures such as culture, traditions and religion. Given that women's rights are contentious in such contexts and the reactions of the public toward CEDAW, this study poses three research questions to understand the perspectives and experiences of women's rights activist in Tonga:

1) What are some of the greatest societal factors hindering women's rights advocacy work in Tonga?

2) How have women's rights activists in Tonga adapted/shaped their advocacy work to suit the Tongan context?

3) What are some of the key challenges they face in shaping advocacy?

[12] UNHRC, 2013.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Family Protection Act: Kingdom of Tonga, 2013.
[15] UNHRC, 2013
[16] Matangi Tonga Online, 2015.

1.1 Statement of the problem:

In part, this research study takes its cue from Nicole George's discussion on the political landscapes as negotiated by women activists and how this affected the appropriateness of various advocacy strategies in Fiji.[17] George studied the emergent trends in women's advocacy in Fiji on a local, regional and international stage throughout the 1960s to contemporary times, with the aim of addressing trends in women's political agency explained by shifts in the global and local political setting.[18] The study focuses on the relationship between political agency and political context, as well as the events and political circumstances that shape the landscape of women's advocacy in Fiji.[19] To expand on the literature on women's rights advocacy in the Pacific Island context, this study builds on George's study by first examining a different Pacific Island society, Tonga. Secondly, this study focuses on the challenges these women activists face in shaping their advocacy strategies with the consideration of social structures. Third, this study differs in the respect of "standpoint", given that I am a male doing research on women-related issues, which may potentially produce a differing perspective and approach to that of a woman or Tongan. Finally, as a Pacific Islander I would be inclined to understand the subtleties of culture and traditions and religion in this context.

The study of women's rights movements and advocacy is extensive, with a large body of literature looking at this not only in the Global North but also in the Global South. In this literature, the premise that the application of a women's rights framework is fluid and universal has produced tensions and struggles in efforts to institutionalize the human rights framework, despite the homogenising tendencies by globalisation. One major critique of a universal women's rights framework and model is that it is often grounded in western histories and norms while the practical implementation and practice and the issues on the ground are quite different.[20] Research shows that unless frameworks are malleable and incorporate factors like

[17] George, 2012.
[18] Ibid
[19] Ibid
[20] Collins *et al,* 2010.

culture, race, class, sexuality and history it will be difficult for them to be integrated into societies.[21]

These factors provide the bulk of the challenges faced by women's rights activists. Research done in Global South contexts such as Egypt, Tunisia and Bangladesh examine how the tenets of CEDAW impedes on already existing cultural and religious paradigms relating to gender with the implications being multifaceted.[22] The implications of the cultural and religious discourse in these countries being, little to no legal representation, little to no autonomy, no access to land, sexual and reproductive and health rights, violence against women and rape, to name a few.

Women activists and women's groupings are thus constantly navigating afore mentioned factors and institutions that perpetuate gender-based inequalities and violence against women. But efforts to apply a standard framework will always present challenges and are subject to mediation by culture.[23] Women's rights advocacy groups are deeply aware of these issues and tend to adopt different paths in developing strategies and agendas to suit the context in which they are in.[24] For example, not using the term feminist in Singapore; or promoting women's rights through Islamic education by including men and utilising aspects of Islamic law that correspond with women's right in Java; and reinterpreting and appropriating certain aspects of folklore through performances as cultural intervention methods in India. All these examples illustrate the agency of women's right groups and activists in utilising certain aspects of culture, tradition or religion to bring women's issues to the forefront. In relation to this study identifies how women's rights activists in Tonga have adapted/shaped their advocacy work to suit the Tongan context.

Women's rights advocacy requires strategizing not only in relation to cultural contexts, but also in relation to the political environment. To understand the challenges faced by women's rights advocates in Tonga, as well as the strategies that are used, it is therefore important to examine the relationship between government and the organizations through which women's rights advocacy occurs. As such, in this study, I use Najam's model on Government-NGO relationships to analyse the

[21] Bunting, 1993.
[22] Brandt & Kaplan, 1995/96
[23] Lloyd, 2007
[24] Margolis, 1993.

strategies specifically in the Tongan context. Najam's model illustrates the relationships between NGOs/CSOs and Government through a means and ends model, much of which illustrate the nuances in the challenges faced by women's rights organisations and/or the strategies taken by them[25].

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims to document and describe the challenges faced by, strategies utilized and experiences of women's rights activist in Tonga in their advocacy work.

1.3 Objectives:

- Identify the societal factors that hinder women's rights advocacy work in Tonga.
- Explore how women's rights activities in Tonga have adapted and shaped their advocacy work in Tonga.
- Determine what are the challenges they face in shaping their advocacy are.

1.4 Research Questions

1) What are some of the greatest societal factors hindering women's rights advocacy work in Tonga?
2) How have women's rights activists in Tonga adapted/shaped their advocacy work to suit the Tongan context?
3) What are some of the key challenges they face in shaping advocacy?

1.5 Significance of the study

Answering these research questions highlights the challenges that women activists face in their day to day work. The role of women in advocacy work is a significant aspect in the drive towards a society of equality and justice by the liberation of the marginalised. Since much of the work is done at a grassroots level the recording of experiences of women's rights activists in Tonga is an especially important aspect of this research. It is the telling of stories by these women that is vital for society, not only to understand the levels of oppression that exists in Tonga but to learn the ways in which these women shape their advocacy.

The experiences of these activists can open up a new platform for dialogue and critical thought on the ways in which these women have navigated societal structures

[25] Najam, 2000.

and raise questions about various ways to strengthen the advocacy work of women's rights in Tonga.

While research on gender issues, and specifically about women's rights in the Pacific Islands contexts have grown since the 1990s, analysis of the processes that impact on women's rights activists' strategies in shaping policy and impacting on changes remain limited.[26] This is why the study by Nicole George on the Fiji women's rights movement was so important and why it forms an important starting point for this study on Tongan women's rights activists.

This study also contributes to expanding our understanding of the cultural, religious and political processes that shape advocacy work more generally. In particular, advocacy in Pacific Island societies occurs in a context where populations are both remote and small, where governments and NGOs are heavily dependent financially on international donors and organizations, and where the influence of indigenous and religious institutions remain strong. By investigating the challenges and strategies of women's rights activists in Tonga, this study speaks to the specific ways religion, culture and politics impact on advocacy work.

1.6 Summary of Research Methodology

This study is looking into the work and organisation of women's rights activists through the experiences and perspectives of the activists themselves. As such, a qualitative methodology was utilised, which is predominantly exploratory in nature and utilised to comprehend social phenomena in an in-depth manner. It was important at this juncture that I also understand the workings of feminist research methodology as I have integrated them into how my research questions will be investigated. This determined that I focus on the issues that women' rights activists are facing, not largely from what I observed but from their standpoint. Feminist research has moved away from objective research paradigms of the positivist traditions that largely produced androcentric forms of knowledge and more into storytelling, engaging in dialogue and creating new conversational partners.[27] This

[26] Underhill-Sem et al, 2016
[27] Fonow & Cook, 1991; O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012

works to give more representation to women and to legitimise their experiences in a highly male dominated world, where their experiences are often maligned.

Furthermore, this study places itself within feminist standpoint epistemology, which illustrates the ways institutions, research, scholarly disciplines, culture and practises oppress and dominate women rather than studying women themselves.[28] Hekman illustrates that the feminist standpoint is based on two central understandings; firstly, that knowledge is situated and perspective, and secondly that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced. [29] Intemann stuck to this premise but furthered feminist standpoint theory by saying that knowledge or "true" perceptions of reality do not arise just because of one's position in society but is achieved when one scrutinises and is critically aware of how power structures shape or limit knowledge in a particular context.[30]

Since the study is contextually Pacific, the development of knowledge through the experiences of Tongan women activists, should be recorded and explained via a Pacific research framework. As such, I have utilised the Kakala framework to contextualize the research methodology of this study, which I describe in greater detail in chapter 3.[31] More specifically the concept of *Talanoa* has become one of the major methods utilised by Pacific researchers when out in the field; *Tala* which means "to inform", "to relay" or "tell" and *Noa* which means "common", "old" or "of no value".[32] Talanoa then translates to talking about nothing of significance without a rigid framework.[33] Violeti notes that in a good talanoa, *noa* creates that space and conditions while *Tala* combines the participants' and researchers' emotions, knowing and experiences- leading to a positive state of enlightenment.[34] While feminist standpoint theory emphasises the view and taking the perspective of marginalised groups, it is important to locate the research process in the perspective and position of Tongan women and Pacific ways of knowing.

[28] Harding, 2004.
[29] Hekman, 1997.
[30] Intemann, 2010.
[31] Fua, 2012.
[32] Violeti, 2006.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

In-depth Interviews / Talanoa

To explore my research questions and informed by my methodological stance, I had talanoa sessions which averaged one hour with each of my seventeen participants. Many of the talanoa sessions were conducted in informal spaces, largely to create an air of ease and comfort for the women, or in their office spaces because of their work schedules. I had devised an interview schedule for guidance and to support the direction of our talanoa sessions so as to not venture too far into the conversational space. I describe this process in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Sampling

Purposive snowball sampling was utilised to recruit women rights activists in Tonga for this study. A total of 17 respondents from 6 different organisations participated in this study (see Table 1). Gaining participants was rather difficult in Tonga as many organisations were difficult to find, and when organizations were identified, often activists were unwilling to participate or were not available because of other work obligations. Initially I had set out with 10 organisations in mind but managed to gain access to six organisations, one of which was a religious women's grouping and the other a government department involved in women's work and organisation. I detail the recruitment process and the specifics of each organisation in depth in Chapter 3, subsection 3.3.1.

Table 1: Number of participants from each women's rights organisations

Organization	**# of participants**
Women's and Children's Crisis Centre	5
The Talitha Project	4
Women's Affairs Division	1
Catholic Women's League	3
Tonga Family Health Association	3
Civil Society Forum of Tonga	1
Total	**17**

Data Analysis

I utilised thematic analysis in this study. I transcribed my interviews and organised them into the two major thematic areas that I had proposed initially: "Challenges to Advocacy" and "Strategies". Within these two broad themes, through an iterative process of a number of other sub-themes arose, informed in part by the literature, as well as the framework on NGO-Government relationships by Najam[35].

1.7 Limitations of the Study

My being male has been the biggest of the limitations of this study. I acknowledge that I have different experiences and my standpoint differs in so many respects from that of a woman's, let alone a Tongan women's rights activist. Furthermore, being a foreign male has added to this limitation. Despite being from the South Pacific and having Tonga as our closest neighbours, there are subtle differences between our cultures, traditions and beliefs. The Tongan cultural dynamic cannot fully be realised and or completely understood by a non-Tongan like myself; faka Tonga can only and wholly be understood and appreciated by a Tongan. There was also a definite language barrier, and this study is constrained by the fact that I could not conduct our talanoa sessions in the Tongan language.

There are definitely missing voices in the narrative of this story, even though this study specifically focuses on women's rights activists. Stanley[36] specifically warns against the biases of NGOs in purporting its own agendas rather than that of its constituents. I acknowledge to get a complete view of the struggles of women and women activists, the participation of all women regardless of religion or their place of employment is paramount. I do not mean to generalise or categorise them as either for or against women's rights in this study, for example, I know there are women who work in religious based NGOs that are working for the economic and social advancement of women in their communities.

[35] Najam, 2000.
[36] 2012/13

1.8 Organisation of the study

This thesis will engage in an analysis of wider literature on the topic of challenges to women's rights advocacy and the strategies they employ to navigate those structures in Chapter 2. It will look at the common challenges to women's rights and accordingly the literature will inform the trajectory of women's rights advocacy internationally, in the global south and most importantly in the South Pacific. The thesis will then move onto the specifics of methodology in Chapter 3, what methodological considerations were taken and the methods used to explore and analyse the research questions. Subsequently this leads to two analysis chapters; first a look at the challenges, in Chapter 4, faced by women activists in Tonga and secondly an analysis of how women's right activists shape their advocacy within Chapter 5- plotting the course to women's equality in Tonga. Chapter 6 concludes with an overview of my analysis and research findings.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Challenges to Women's Rights Advocacy

Women's rights advocacy work has had many challenges since the suffrage movements in the 19th century; more so the mobilisation for the rights of non-western women in colonial and post-colonial contexts, where the politics of gender is complicated not only by politics of race, sexuality and class, but also of culture and international relations.[37]

After the three waves of international feminism and the lead up to the adoption of the Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth Conference for Women in Beijing, 1995[38], women's rights and the organisations that are accountable to monitor them have proliferated. Women's rights are multifaceted and offer an important framework for solutions to the challenges that women all over the world face daily. Despite many differences in approaches and goals, overall women's rights organisations share a common objective of the removal of social impediments to women's active participation in all spheres of public land private life through a fulfilling and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making[39].

Women's rights advocacy in the global sense, is supposed to be universal and fluidly following the framework as set out by international organisations. Women's rights movements and hence advocacy follow common streams in their individual countries depending on which areas are prioritised and need to be addressed.[40] Evans outlines a guide to feminist advocacy work showing that advocacy is in effect various strategies that seek to challenge ideas and beliefs- to mobilise and inspire a mass of people to demand change from relevant stakeholders.[41] A critical part of advocacy is navigating "spaces"- this is crucial to planning because it has an effect on their advocacy outcomes- whether the space has the capacity to and resources to impact change, whether their agendas are being promoted, whether the institutions are

[37] Yuval-Davis, 2006
[38] UN Women, 2017
[39] Ibid
[40] Margolis, 1993
[41] Evans, 2005

relevant to address the agendas, are all questions that need to be asked .[42] There are many strategies that women advocacy groups consider, either alone or in conjunction with a number of other strategies. To name a few: Research and analysis- where much of their advocacy work should be grounded in factual evidence to inform their advocacy, as well where research is utilised to legitimise claims, challenge existing/dominating discourses and create awareness. Lobbying- where advocacy groups engage directly with policy and decision makers. Alliance building where there is combined effort and partnerships with other organisations, government departments and law enforcement to reach a singular goal. Finally, effective communication- the use of advanced technology and mass media.[43]

On the other hand, there is the issue of adoption and adaptation of these frameworks. Despite homogenising tendencies produced by globalisation, the institutionalisation of human rights is characterized by multiple tensions and struggles across societies and having a universal framework of women's rights is hard to sustain.[44] One of the major critiques is that international frameworks of women's rights was developed by the United Nations, an international institution envisioning a universal model of human rights and often grounded in western histories and norms, while on the ground, the meaning and practice of women's rights and issues are much different.[45] While nation states who are party to the United Nations are obligated to sign on, the implications in practice vary by context. For example, Llewellyn-Fowler & Overton look at the tensions of the application of human rights in light of development in Fiji. Although Fiji has a great record of signing onto conventions, the country has a long history where influence by the church, religion and culture has been prioritised over all else, with sometimes negative implications to the human rights situation in country.[46] Research shows that international women's rights will not be integrated into specific contexts unless and until it incorporates and takes into account the norms- as influenced by culture, race, class, sexuality and history- of a given society.[47]

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[42] Evans, 2005; Nijsten, 2011; Moghadam, 2007.
[43] Ibid
[44] Yuval-Davis, 2006.
[45] Collins *et al,* 2010.
[46] 2010.
[47] Bunting, 1993.

Despite the progress in women's rights around the world, it should be noted that many challenges still persist. Often this comes in the forms of violence against women, gender-based discrimination in all spheres of society, and access to justice. Religion, culture and traditions are continuously used as a shield for violating women's rights.[48] At the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the challenges in relation to implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls was noted.[49] These challenges reiterate the need for non-governmental organisations and civil society as a whole to note that there is still progress to be made. There is a labyrinth of challenges that are brought forward from a variety of factors in society, namely from social norms and values that have been perpetuated by culture, traditions and more notably by religion. Women's rights organisations around the globe are often forerunners in upholding women's rights and holding necessary stakeholders accountable. The proliferation of women's rights movements and the ideologies that they champion have indeed increased manifold, even in countries which are highly patriarchal. Nevertheless, there gender inequalities and women's rights issues continue to be significant and important across the world, in both the Global South and North.[50]

In the Pacific context, religious and cultural institutions are often identified to be particularly influential in society in shaping discourses and practices around gender and women's status. Tonga recently exemplified how powerful and rooted these structures are in society, shown by protests in opposition to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Brandt and Kaplan's paper looks at the tensions between women's rights and religious rights. Specifically, it examines the tenets of CEDAW, the nature of Islam-based (in Egypt, Bangladesh and Tunisia) reservations and the course of women's lives in these countries. According to these authors, CEDAW is often a tool in which one can examine the tensions between women's rights and religious rights. Even though the goal of CEDAW is to eradicate gender-based discrimination often it impinges on already existing cultural/religious paradigms pertaining to gender. Within the convention, article 28 (1) allows ratification subject to reservations of

[48] Farrior, 2009.
[49] UN Women, 2014.
[50] Coleman, 2004.

certain articles, providing no criteria for determining the reservations compatibility[51]. The study suggests that many reservations made in these three countries are often because of conflicts between religious laws. The implications to women's lives are multifaceted; little to no legal rights and representation, no personal autonomy in any sphere of society (private or public) and the practical realities of these women.

This situation of countries instituting international conventions with reservations and without necessarily implementing larger normative changes leads women to be caught in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, they have legislation that protects their rights and on the other hand, the societal norms and practices bars them from exercising these rights.[52] This is seen in Patel's study, where Hindu women have enjoyed the right to property protected by law but which are limited in practice because of the context in which it is applied and the strength of the institutions that implement these laws vis-à-vis cultural and traditional structures.[53] In the Pacific Islands context, the ratification of CEDAW in Vanuatu has not been fulfilled because of the failure in land rights for women. This is because it is unable to account for the different factors that are present in the country.[54]

Nevertheless, the processes involved in these kinds of ratifications of international conventions are important. In becoming active participants in the political and democratic processes, women at a grassroots level are able to bridge the gap between what is perceived as personal transcending that onto a public platform where they are able to address the issues- relating to land, sexuality, and sexual reproductive health. Women's advocacy work at a community level, where they are normally perceived to exist gives an added advantage to these groups to try and change and challenge patriarchal structures.[55]

It is important to note that the 'cultural' opposition or challenge that women's rights activists face are often in part products of colonial history. For example, Okeke illustrates that in Nigeria, the legal basis which are supposed to protect the rights and status of women are frequently embodied within cultural elements of pre-colonial

[51] 1995/96.
[52] Chari, 2009
[53] Patel, 2006.
[54] Nagarajan and Parashar, 2012.
[55] Sekha, 2006.

frameworks as understood/instituted during colonial times that seem to legitimise and affirms men's position over women. [56] In the Middle East and South Asia, the rise of religious nationalism was due to the colonisation of these regions, hence in a colonial context – since the family was an untouched space for the colonisers-dominance was exhibited over women as they became markers of local resistance.[57] As such, rights and freedoms of women have often become 'battlegrounds' in which to defend religion, culture and tradition in the global south. For example, in Iran, 'westernised' women were considered to be the cause of the moral decay of society.[58] Additionally, due to the processes by which legal systems have been instituted in post-colonial contexts, access to and use of legal systems are often constrained by cultural norms and customary law.[59] In the Pacific Island context, Jalal also illustrates this important point about how Pacific Island women are often subjected to customary law, limiting their access to state apparatuses that deal with these issues.[60]

Women activists groups in the Global South constantly face the challenges of navigating the politics of difference in their communities. The integration and application of universal human (women's) rights in non-western communities proves difficult when there are challenges from grounded and institutionalised societal factors. Women activists from indigenous populations often face particular challenges related to tensions between the individual rights framework that dominates women's rights discourse and the collective rights discourse that is important in addressing injustices experienced by indigenous communities. Richards in a study on Mapuche women in Chile highlight the challenges faced in negotiating these tensions in their efforts to talk about and address issues of indigenous women's rights.[61] In the Pacific context, while indigenous communities are the majority populations, the dilemmas faced by indigenous women in advocating for women's rights elsewhere are still relevant. Jolly's research shows that the application of women's rights in Vanuatu is often subjected to considerations of both culture and

[56] Okeke, 2000.
[57] Ray and Korteweg, 1999.
[58] Ibid
[59] Bovarnick, 2007.
[60] Jalal, 2009.
[61] Richards, 2005

traditions[62]. Women in Vanuatu often find ways to address issues pertaining to domestic violence and rape; firstly, through the traditional meetings headed by men and second by redress in courts of law. The former are patriarchal institutions that treat women's issues as trivial and the latter putting women, who seek justice, in precarious positions because of the trust they place in "Western" institutions[63]. It was also found that, in both cases, women in Vanuatu are often marginalised because of the integration of religion into these institutions. Advocacy in this context requires multi-pronged simultaneous approaches, which can themselves come into conflict with each other.

In contexts where religious institutions continue to exert powerful influence on norms, traditions and practices on a daily basis, the advocacy terrain is further complicated because women's rights advocates find religious institutions as not only a site of opposition to critique/challenge, but one which they need to find common ground with to legitimise their own claims.

Research has shown that the levels of religiosity are a major hindrance to women's rights all over the world. Adinkrah in a study linking religious edicts, patriarchy and homicide against Indo-Fijian women, is an important example in the pacific context of how religious institutions impact on women's status, and therefore become a major actor that women's rights advocates have to contend with.[64] Mumtaz illustrated the challenges faced by women activists in Pakistan and how religion can legitimise the restriction and/or marginalisation of women's rights[65]. While Muslim societies have been scrutinised recently for how religion influences laws and women, the interlinkages between religion and law is not limited to Muslim societies. For example, Austria shows that in the case of the Philippines, Catholic religious norms still dominate family, civil and penal laws.[66] In 2002, the president of the country had increasingly integrated religious dogma into legislature pertaining to sexual and reproductive and health rights for women with increasing pressure from the conservative Catholic groups.[67] As a result of the influence of the Catholic Church,

[62] Jolly, 1996.
[63] Ibid
[64] Adinkrah, 2001.
[65] Mumtaz, 2005.
[66] Austria, 2004.
[67] ibid

the State banned emergency contraceptive drugs issued to women and girls who have been subjected to rape. In these cases, as in Pakistan and the Philippines, where state policies are influenced by religious institutions, women's rights advocacy need to be able to change and target both institutions.

Because women's rights advocacy targets powerful institutions, they are often subject to a range of negative sanctions, including violence against them. For instance, this is illustrated by the policy and practice note by Amir where women defenders (activists) in Egypt routinely face gender-based violence and family and social pressures.[68] Furthermore research indicates that women defenders in that society are constantly threatened with the use of sexual violence for participating in in public demonstrations[69]. It leaves women defenders in a difficult position and therefore there is a need to develop strategies to target these issues not only in the case of women defenders (activists) in Egypt but for women all around the world.

While there are quite a few studies on women's rights and advocacy in the Melanesian context, there is a dearth of literature relating to that of women's rights studies in Polynesian societies. There are no studies on the women's rights advocacy work in the Polynesian context of Tonga. It is important to explore this gap also because the status and experience of women in Tonga are complicated by the fact that it is a society in which there is a high percentage of educated women, with minimal gender inequality in wages, and where women hold visible and highly paid positions,[70] while at the same time being characterized by high rates of violence against women.[71]

2.2 Shaping Advocacy Contextually

Efforts to apply a common standard of ethics and moral practice in relation to women's rights will continually be subject to mediation by culture[72]. It is argued by Lloyd that the human rights discourse be sensitised to the multiplicity of cultural

[68] Amir, 2013.
[69] Ibid
[70] Vakata, 2007.
[71] Underhill-Sem et al, 2016
[72] Lloyd, 2007.

contexts[73]. Similarly, Margolis discusses the idea that movements adopt different paths in developing strategies, agendas and forming different structures to suit the context in which they exist[74]. McGuire looked at the experiences of four women from China, India, Poland and the US on the origins of their feminist/ activist spirits and found that these women's activism was shaped by different cultural and historical contexts reflecting the issues that they held most closely. The article finds that by looking at the different women in their own contexts, just how these women have allowed the personal and the political to become one. The article posits just how central to feminist identity formation is making the political personal and the personal political.[75] Okin notes that very often women's freedom and inequality in numerous parts of the world are considered as western frames of thought and somewhat polar to the existing societal structures.[76] Often women from the developing world, where culture, tradition and religion are powerful structures, make the deliberate choice of avoiding calling themselves feminists, as these are regarded as problematic values from the west. [77] For instance, one strategy by women's rights activist that are highlighted in the paper, given Indonesia's highly religious context, is that these women have adopted the term 'gender activist' instead, because it is seen as more inclusive than women's rights. This would be more receptive and would persuade men to become involved in their efforts. Often, they also publicly avoided using the word feminist as this was perceived negatively by the public and seen more often as a western or American concept.[78]

In many Pacific Island societies, attitudes of the public towards women's rights organisations are also often associated with western forms of knowledge that impede on cultural and traditional milieus. This is a serious concern because people worldwide see the inequalities of the sexes as invisible, culturally appropriate, natural or insignificant hence failing to recognise how important it is to overcome such inequalities.[79] Fittingly the study by Bovarnick asks crucial questions- Is the promotion of human rights indeed a universally effective tool in addressing violence

[73] Ibid
[74] Margolis, 1993.
[75] 2010.
[76] Okin, 1998.
[77] Hewitt, 2011.
[78] Adamson, 2007.
[79] Okin, 1998.

against women? And further, have the human rights discourse become sufficiently gender- and culture- sensitive to serve as a useful tool for women's emancipatory projects around the world? [80]

This promotes the need for advocacy programmes, especially those relating to women's rights, to adopt and develop contextually sound frameworks. When activist use frameworks that are accepted as indigenous, they are able to better disarm political leaders because these leaders then cannot delegitimize claims as outside imposition of ideas.[81] A relevant example is the case of the [limited] women's rights organisations working in Singapore, where the society is highly controlled by state law and policies.[82] Sometimes, this can involve just simple tactics such as what The Association of Women for Action Research (AWARE) have developed as an unsaid policy to not call themselves feminists, because of the negative reactions that they have received in the past from the government and members of the public. Therefore, this has created a situation where they are able to work in such a space without having such opposition to their organisation.[83]

Other times (and more often), the work is more complex, such as attempts to create Islamic feminism in Iran and other Muslim societies.[84] As seen in Austria's study on the Philippines in relation to challenges faced by women's rights advocacy, there is a need to develop sound methods that will best serve the purposes of advocacy on the sexual and reproductive health rights of women in light of the conservative church's influence and interest in dominating state law and policies.[85] The study by Adamson illustrates the efforts of Javanese women's rights activists in promoting women's rights through Islamic education.[86] More specifically, the study examines the discursive shifts and arguments in the context of their advocacy programmes that are designed to promote women's rights. Women's rights activists saw the usefulness of integrating men into their programmes by using a workshop platform called the *Pelatihan Fiqh Sayasah* (*PFS*) where they would discuss the interpretations of

[80] Bovarnick, 2007.
[81] Hewitt, 2011.
[82] Lyon, 2006.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ahmadi, 2006.
[85] Austria, 2004.
[86] Adamson, 2007.

Qur'anic passages and its relation to women's rights.[87] Wieringa also discusses the rise of an Islamic Indonesia where there has been a development of more conservative groups and the proliferation of fundamentalist thought, that scholars link to limiting the mobilisation of women.[88] However the resulting factor is that a Muslim feminist discourse is built around the reform of Islam and CEDAW, insisting that these are universal rights and conform to the basic principles of Islam.

In another case, Garlough illustrates the use of appropriated and reinterpreted forms of Indian folklore and dance as rhetorical interventions for issues on rape, inheritance law and women's representation in texts.[89] By politicising aspects of popular Indian traditional folklore, women activist performers were able to get audiences to reflect on pressing social and economic problems relating to women.[90] Relative to shaping advocacy to contexts, the performances act as cultural intervention methods and a way of working directly with people's consciousness.[91] This shows the agency of women activists in utilising certain aspects of culture, tradition or religion (factors that can simultaneously hinder the women's rights agenda) to bring women's issues to the forefront.

When policies promote gender equality and development, essentially, they are seeking a fundamental change in the social makeup of any society and therefore challenge the historical patterns of state-society, religion and cultural groups and the contours of citizenship. In effect the strategies, priorities and effectiveness of women advocates are shaped by state capacity, policies and degree of democracy. Htun and Weldon offer an analytical framework on gender policies based on two major keys. First, on a plethora of issues that involves different actors for each and why some actors matter more in some areas. And second, actors have different powers and effects in different contexts.[92] Perhaps one of the most pertinent examples of how women promote policies of gender equality and development and challenge patriarchal actors and systems is the Green Belt Movement (GBM), founded by Nobel Peace Laureate Wangrai Maathai. Maathai was a leader in Kenyan society in

[87] Ibid
[88] 2006.
[89] Garlough, 2008.
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid
[92] 2010.

terms of liberating women to elevated positions that were contradictory to the beliefs held on gender relations in a highly patriarchal society.[93] Through the GBM, Maathai was able to highlight the nuances in the way men address issues related to development that are usually indifferent to the qualms of the grassroots people, sadly having the most effect on women.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, based on a review of research on women's rights advocacy in the Global South context, we have seen that:

1. Women's rights- in the Global South- are introduced concepts or 'planted flowers.'
2. Religion, culture and traditions have an impact on women's rights advocacy work and also impacts women in general.
3. Practical implications arise from these, such as access to land and other economic resources. Sometimes, women activists are physically harmed or killed for challenging these practical issues for women and are sometimes even killed.
4. Given the challenges women face, women's rights activists have ingeniously shaped their advocacy work to suit their contexts or societies.
5. The documentation of the challenges of women's rights advocacy work has been slow in the South Pacific specifically.
6. There is a dearth of literature on these subject areas in the South Pacific, and this study hopes to fill some of those gaps.

[93] Muthuki, 2006.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Under this chapter I outline the approaches I employed under a qualitative study. I briefly explain the feminist research paradigm and the justification of such an approach. I further explain why I have employed and integrated a second approach to the study which is Pacific oriented in nature. By integrating two approaches, I am ensuring that not only am I using a normative feminist research paradigm but taking a step further in understanding the experiences of these women from a Pacific perspective through an integrated Pacific approach.

I move on to discuss my research participants and field site- particularly the organisations that I engaged women from, outlining the methods I had taken for sampling, the problems I had faced during field work, and the ways in which I had overcome these issues. Under the methods section, I provide a detailed account of how I collected information. Under in-depth interviews, which are customarily a tool to collecting data, I have also integrated the Pacific notion of *talanoa,* which is briefly discussed in this section further below.

During my research stay, I faced many challenges, particularly with recruiting participants. Initially I had proposed to limit my participant scope to women involved in the NGO sector. However, this proved difficult for reasons I outline below. This is why in part I expanded the scope by also engaging a participant from a government department. Since this research is focused on the strategies women's rights advocates/activists use, I realised while being in the field in Tonga, that women in government are also important actors and enablers for women's rights. As such, I decided that this research would benefit from including a perspective from a participant in government. This participant was unique largely in part to the similarity of the work that she does in relation to the women's organisations and the close relationship she has with the women activists.

I used thematic analysis, which initially started with two major themes. In the process of analysis, a number of sub themes emerged, which were coded and recoded

in several iterations. In order to conceptualise these, I used broad frameworks under which to analyse my talanoa sessions, that I detail further below.

3.2 Approach

3.2.1 A Feminist Approach

This study, because of the nature of its inquiry uses a qualitative approach. More specifically it uses a feminist research approach. Feminist research methodologies have critiqued classical objective research paradigms of the positivist traditions and have developed new methods, methodologies and epistemologies. Drawing from critical theory, feminist research has underscored the importance of engaging research participants in dialogue as new conversational partners, and as such, a qualitative approach has been more common.[94]

Historically, scientific inquiry and in effect knowledge produced has exclusively been claimed to belong in the male dominated realm thus producing relatively androcentric knowledge: usually with both participants in general and women in particular being objects of research rather than active participants or authors of knowledge. Feminist epistemologies or "ways of knowing" are a response to the limitations and biases placed by patriarchal academics and researchers, changing the research process to answer gender related issues. [95] This study places itself within feminist standpoint epistemology, which illustrates the ways institutions, research, scholarly disciplines, culture and practises oppress and dominate women rather than 'simply' studying women.[96] Hekman illustrates that the feminist standpoint is based on two central understandings; firstly, that knowledge is socially situated; those at the margins in society are better situated to understand and question than those that are privileged in society, and research examining power relations should start with

[94] Hesse-Biber & Piatell 2012: 180
[95] Fonow & Cook, 1991; O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012;
[96] Harding, 2004.

those on the margins. [97] While dominant scientific and public discourse may label the dominant/ruling group's perception of reality is real and thus reject other notions/ definitions of reality, feminist standpoint theory argues that the perception of reality from the oppressed is the centre of the "true" perceptions of reality and hence are liberatory.[98]

Intemann stuck to this premise but furthered feminist standpoint theory by saying that knowledge or "true" perceptions of reality do not arise just because of one's position in society but is achieved when one scrutinises and is critically aware of how power structures shape or limit knowledge in a particular context.[99] This is the area from which feminist standpoint theory emerges. Feminist standpoint allows us to view society from the perspective of women and groups of women. Feminist standpoint is not important because it allows us to view society from a woman's perspective but also because it allows society to realise the structures that marginalise and oppress certain members. Thus, for example, Philosopher of science, Sandra Harding wrote in relation to this: "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order."[100]

Tongan women rights activists occupy socially marginalised positions in relation to their gender, but also as women activists located in the Global South in the larger international women's movement/community. This study aimed to expand our understanding of the cultural and political work women's rights activists do from a context in which marginalization, oppression and advocacy are different from 'western' and 'liberal' histories and ideas of oppression.

This study engages in "consciousness-raising" which is a fundamental factor in feminist methodologies to illustrate that women are aware of and are active stakeholders in the processes of social change.[101] This research engages in "consciousness-raising" (CR) by recording women activists' stories and experiences and analysing recurrent themes that stymie women's rights advocacy work in Tonga.

[97] Hekman, 1997.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Intemann, 2010.
[100] Harding, 1993, p. 56
[101] Olesen, 1994.

The methodology in this study attempts to participate in this process of CR at two levels: 1) Women activists reflect on their collective experiences and work toward solutions and to better their advocacy methods. The demanding nature of the work and challenges of advocacy often create little time for these kinds of reflections. As I engaged with these women, questions on challenges really motivated some of the women to think about what some of the more pressing ones that they face are? Consequently, when asked questions on how they strategize around the issue, many took thoughtful pauses before answering and shared that they found this process meaningful and useful for their own work. 2) The bulk of women's rights advocacy work and research in the Pacific is conducted by women, and either by women from the specific PIC or by women from metropoles. As such, many of the women were very surprised that I, as a Fijian male citizen was undertaking this research topic. In a small way, this difference produced cross-cultural and cross-gendered interactions that were important for myself, as someone working in women's rights advocacy. In brief, while CR based research can take more political, active and collective forms, as seen by these types of responses I got when I engaged with my participants, this truly created a space and reflection and conversation.

3.2.2 The Kakala Framework: Tui as Pacific Approach

> "*For Pacific peoples, the historical pattern of data collection, knowledge creation and theorising has been established by outside researchers gathering Pacific people's stories*" (Vaioleti, 2006: 22).

The above quote is from Vaioleti's[102] discussion on developing appropriate research methodologies when researching educational and social issues of Pacific peoples. The paper illustrates the need for researchers- foreign and Pacific- to develop research methods and approaches that are epistemologically Pacific. This need stems from structural research methodologies of western research methods. In the same way that women have historically been objects of study, Pacific Island peoples have similarly been objectified. Fua[103] echoes the sentiment noting that as early as the 17th century, foreigners recording (using normative- western- research methods) our

[102] Vaioleti, 2006.
[103] 2012.

culture and traditional knowledge systems often do so with partial understanding and superficially modifying them as interesting, with little to no value.

The Kakala Framework developed out of this need for Pacific researchers to do research as insiders rather than under the pretence of being an outside and objective entity looking in. In doing so the researcher holistically engages in fundamental Pacific elements such as kinship systems, recognition of actions influenced by the spiritual, traditional and religious, and a connection to the deep cultural concepts that affect Pacific people's realities.[104] The Kakala Framework developed by Tongan Professor Konai Helu Thaman consists of six key components- *Teu, Toli, Tui, Luva, Malie,* and *Mafana*- which are used as metaphors for the research process.[105] This study has integrated the aspect of *Toli* as its Pacific approach. The word *toli* in the Tongan language means "to pick a flower" or choose an object. In the making of a garland in Tonga, flowers have to be carefully picked, under consideration of the design of the garland, who the garland is intended for. Furthermore, young girls who are tasked with this activity have to consider the owners of the gardens from which these flowers are picked. [106] In the research process, this is the data collection stage where participants are carefully chosen, under the consideration of ethical guidelines. Under the *toli* stage is the research tool *talanoa.* In correspondence with consciousness-raising, it is noted that *talanoa* functions from a constructivist perspective; basically, that knowledge is constructed and produced in the process of talanoa and research. The use of *talanoa* in my study is described in more depth in 3.4.1 of this chapter.

The justification for such an approach is twofold; most noticeably (1) the study is contextually Pacific, and (2) the development of knowledge through the experiences of Tongan women, should be recorded and explained via a Pacific research framework. While feminist standpoint theory emphasises the view and taking the perspective of marginalised groups, it is important to locate the research process in the perspective and position of Tongan women and Pacific ways of knowing.

[104] Ibid.
[105] Fua, 2012
[106] Ibid.

3.3 Sample

Currently there are at least seven non-governmental organisations that deal with women's issues in Tonga, six of which are non-church related.[107] The study had proposed to interview at least 2-3 participants from each of these organisations listed which meant that the sample size for the study would reach about 20. Practically, the study was only able to recruit 17 participants for the study, for reasons that are mentioned in the following sub-sections of this chapter. Before I move on, it must be noted that I have changed the names of all the women participants to ensure confidentiality.

Of the seven organisations listed I managed to gain access to three of the organisations. (1) The Women and Children's Crisis Centre of Tonga was the organisation where most of my participants were recruited from. (2) The Tonga Family Health Association, and (3) the Catholic Women's league of Tonga. Of the organisations that were not listed, was (1) the Talitha Project, where I gained the second most participants from. (2) The Civil Society Forum of Tonga, also an organisation that participates in women's rights and women's organisation although they are actors on a more general human rights level. I gained access to the organisations through the Women's Affairs Division which is the secretariat for the women's organisation present in Tonga. Although initially I had proposed to stay within the realm of NGOs and CSOs, issues in gaining access to organisations and participants led me to getting involved with the Women's Affairs Division which is under the Ministry of Internal Affair. Details of each of these organizations are described next.

[107] JICA, 2010.

Table 1: Organisations and number of Participants Interviewed

Organization	**Number of Particpants**
Women and Children's Crisis Centre	5
The Talitha Project	4
Women's Affairs Division	1
Catholic Women's League	3
Tonga Family Health Association	3
Civil Society Forum of Tonga	1
Total	**17**

3.3.1 Women's Organisations

Women's and Children's Crisis Centre, Tonga (WCCC)

The Women's and Children's Crisis Centre of Tonga is one of, if not, the most prominent and most present women's organisation in Tonga. The organisation is committed to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and children.[108] The WCCC focuses on two major thematic areas branching from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which are the Convention on the rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The WCCC is one of two service providers (the other being the Centre for Women and Children) where victims of rape, sexual harassment and violence are able to seek a safe space- the WCCC provides safe houses- and freely available counselling services for survivors of violence, rape and sexual harassment to access. The organisation has many independent programmes aimed at addressing women's issues and also programmes in which they are collectively involved in with other human and women's rights organisations in Tonga.

[108] WCCC, 2014

Tonga Family Health Association (TFHA)

The organisation which was established in 1975 is the forerunner of advocating for Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Tonga. The TFHA's primary role is to promote and integrate family health services, family planning, and sexual health at the community level, targeting the poor and marginalised people, especially youth and women who are most vulnerable.[109] This organisation has projects that are run in cooperation with the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF), mainly in mainstreaming sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and awareness into the public-school system in Tonga.

Catholic Women's League of Tonga

The Catholic Women's league is a church affiliated organisation, run by an executive board of Catholic women based in Mau'fanga in Tonga, which is a few minutes out of central Nukualofa. Many on the executive board are not employed by the organisations but several have full time employment within government ministries. The sole purpose of this organisation is to empower women financially and economically, mainly by selling handicraft made by women in the rural areas on Tongatapu and the outer islands. The organisation often holds handicraft workshops, where women are taught how to make quality products to ensure that they are sold. Furthermore, the organisation also provides financial management workshops to help women manage the profits that have been acquired through the sale of their handicraft. The CWL Tonga played a major role in the mobilisation women last year during the protests against the ratification of CEDAW (this will be discussed further in the subsequent chapters).

The Talitha Project, Tonga

The Talitha project is also one of the most prominent organisations present within Nukualofa, Tonga. The Talitha Project focuses on the empowerment of young girls by holding training and information sessions, on topics ranging from sexual reproductive health to women's rights conventions. The project runs parallel with a youth focused organisation called ICON which empowers youth in Tonga through the creative and performance arts. The Talitha project uses ICON as a platform to

[109] IPPF, n.d.

spread awareness to the general youth population and as a way to gain male advocates for women's- especially young girls- issues.

The Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT)

The Civil Society of Tonga, which was established in 2001 acts as an umbrella organisation for all civil society organisations in Tonga.[110] The function of the CSFT is to act as a coordinator for all CSOs in Tonga to ensure that they reach the full capacity of their roles and to prevent an overlap in priority areas for each CSOs. The CSFT is very much involved women's rights organisations providing capacity building, safe spaces, resource materials and much needed coordination between women's organisations.

3.3.2 Sampling Challenges and The Women's Affair's Division

In recruiting participants, I faced three major problems with sampling when arriving in Tonga: First, there was a challenge in identifying where these organisations were based. Even though the island of Tongatapu is fairly small, many of the people do not know the locations of most women's organisations. Furthermore, some had never heard of the organisation itself. In most instances (this will be discussed further in the next chapter) this could indicate a lack of awareness Tonga's population has toward and the level of importance placed on the work that women's organisations carry out in Tongan society. Alternatively, it could also indicate who is visible internationally vs. who is known locally, since the initial list was gathered from international development agency reports. Nonetheless, the Women's and Children's Crisis Centre and the Talitha Project were the most popular of the Tonga based women's organisations mainly because of their high presence within Tonga- which was achieved through hard work on part of the women activists working within the organisations. Therefore, a majority of my participants came from these two organisations.

A second challenge was recruiting the participants themselves. Due to delays in research funding and constraints of time regarding completing fieldwork for the Masters programme, I had arrived in Tonga at a time where they had three major celebrations. I arrived in the second week of the two-week long celebration of the

[110] CSFT, n.d.

Queen Mother's 90th birthday. At the same time, there was the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the oldest and most prominent of Tongan high schools, Tupou College and also the Methodist Church conference. Hence, the Tongan population were fully engrossed in the preparations for all these occasions. The women especially played a major role in these occasions, being at the helm of cooking copious amounts of food for feasts, preparing weaved pandanus mats and tapa cloth, and decorating the venues where these feasts and ceremonies were to be held.

In the 25 days that I was present in Tonga, the country had observed three public holidays. In addition to the on-going activities, Tonga was to conduct the 2016 National Local Government elections which saw the highest number of female candidates run in the country's history. Many women activists- most of whom were the most experienced- had left the main island of Tongatapu to hold workshops and training sessions for these women candidates which had left a very few women activists on the main island.

Finally, another challenge was many of the women activists, usually those at the lower levels of the organisation, were reluctant to at first- speak with a foreign researcher who spoke little to nothing of the Tongan language and of course who was a male. During field work it was observable that the Tongan language was often the only language spoken during/at workshops and trainings; this is obviously not problematic to the Tongan people; however, it does make research on multiple levels difficult for researchers not from the Tongan context. What was problematic, in the case of the women participants, was their willingness to engage with me in the English language. I had encountered some women activists whose working knowledge of the English language was limited and as a result were shy to hold lengthy conversations without being conscious of how they spoke. I acknowledge that given that there are social fault lines along English language skills in Tonga and the Pacific, that this study is constrained by the fact that I was not able to conduct interviews in the Tongan language.

This led me to make certain considerations to my sampling. In particular, the decision to have talanoa sessions at the Women Affairs Department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs- as the department often acts as a secretariat for women's groupings in Tonga. The Women's Affairs Division (WAD) under the Ministry of

Internal Affairs in Tonga played a major role at helping me build this rapport. The Women's Affairs Division - based at the National Council of Women, Tonga formerly known as *Langafonua 'a Fafine Tonga* was established by Tonga's last female monarch, Queen Salote Tupou III[111]- is an office that engages at/on all levels of women's empowerment from grassroots level training to developing policy aimed at tackling women related issues and the growth of women's positions in Tongan society. The WAD also acts as a coordinator and the unofficial secretariat of all women's affiliated organisations that keeps track of and helps with all activities undertaken- mostly by non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations- so as to avoid replication of materials and programmes. A participant at this ministerial desk acted as gate-keeper while I was in Tonga which was a major aid to gaining other participants through her extensive network. I managed to get into contact with this participant, through the head of my host family in Tonga. After relaying the problems, I was facing to him during my first few days there he set up an appointment with the WAD, he himself working within the Government, got me through. I must add here that I quote extensively from an in-depth talanoa session with my participant from the WAD, as she had very in-depth knowledge and experience of women's groupings, legislature, together with the process behind the ratification of CEDAW from the government's perspective. Perhaps what is interesting about this participant is her unique location between the government and non-government sector.

Although I had faced these difficulties, I managed, through the WAD to build a rapport among the women's organisations in Tonga. This was my primary technique of gaining the trust of the women's organisations and the women activists working within the organisations. I had ensured that I was a visible actor within the sphere of women's activities, attending workshops, trainings and visiting the work spaces of these women. For instance, I was invited to observe and participate in a training workshop on the formulation of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials aimed at tackling- across the board- women's related issues. This was a great opportunity afforded to me by the WAD to gain potential participants. While the original plan of using snowball sampling with participants in the organisations

[111] MIC Tonga, 2014.

was less effective, it was in the process of participating and making myself visible in these activities that I was able to recruit participants and identify organizations.

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 In-depth Interviews

The study utilised in-depth interviews with women who are experienced and are agents of change in the field of women's rights advocacy in Tonga. The interviews were semi-structured aiming to give more voice to the respondents and at the same time not losing sight of the task at hand. It has been noted by Hesse-Biber that moving within the spectrum of informal to formal interviews allows feminist researchers to gather exploratory data and gain in-depth understanding.[112] Each of the women participants were given full knowledge of what the study was via the study's information guide[113] and upon agreeing to participate signed a consent and confidentiality agreement form.[114]

In most instances the interviews largely occurred in very informal spaces. I had employed this technique to try to create a more conversational atmosphere in which participants would be comfortable. Pacific culture and traditions are usually passed down from one generation to the next orally, with a vibrant history of storytelling. The concept of *Talanoa* (hereafter replaces the word interview) has become one of the major methods utilised by Pacific researchers when out in the field; *Tala* which means "to inform", "to relay" or "tell" and *Noa* which means "common", "old" or "of no value".[115] Talanoa then translates to talking about nothing of significance without a rigid framework.[116] Violeti notes that in a good talanoa, *noa* creates that space and conditions while *Tala* combines the participants' and researchers' emotions, knowing and experiences- leading to a positive state of connectedness and knowing[117] As such these women spoke on a wide range of issues and the experiences that came in dealing with these issues; however I did guide our conversation back when topics deviated too far away from the topic under research or for too long into our talanoa.

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[112] Hesse-Biber, 2007.
[113] Refer Appendix
[114] Refer Appendix
[115] Violeti, 2006.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

The talanoa sessions with these women activists, were in average about an hour-long. This is a major drawback of the study as the experiences of the women, I acknowledge, were not entirely captured within this timeframe and therefore I cannot assume that I am telling their stories in full or begin to try to capture them in their entirety.

I began the talanoa sessions by introducing my experiences in the sphere of human rights and women's rights, so as to create a kind of relational space with the women. As Gustvson and Cytrynbaum[118] illustrate that the initially proposed plan of data collection often gets side-lined with the relational dynamics of research taking centre stage. With this in mind, I acknowledged my heritage as a Pacific Islander- with a diverse Pacific Island ancestry- to expand further the boundaries of this relational space. Much attention, when doing research in a context besides your own, should be paid to being aware of and creating relational spaces- as these influence research relationships, data collection, analysis and texts that are produced.[119] This proved successful in most cases as many of the women participants warmed up to me. I also made a strong effort to avoid the use of all technical jargon in the talanoa sessions, to create ease of communication and a space of comfort the women participants.

3.5 Data Analysis

The 25-day research stay in Tonga allowed me to collect data that was needed for the study. During my research stay I utilised a recorder from which I recorded the talanoa sessions with my participants. I also kept a field journal where I recorded observations during my interviews and also in non- interview situations; observations like what I saw on television, what the environment in Tonga felt like to me as a foreigner. These observations- in my field journal- helped me "to suss-out" the normal daily life of Tongan people from my own perspective. While keeping in mind that these are my observations, many a time during the talanoa sessions I would have some of my observations or questions from my observations answered. This helped with the research process and especially my talanoa sessions because it sometimes served as an ice breaker with my participants. For example, one of my major

[118] 2003
[119] Gustvson and Cytrynbaum, 2003.

observations on my second day –which was a Sunday- there, was the pride that the people had for the Monarchy and secondly on being Christian. My field journal proved very handy, especially at the end of the day when reflecting on what had occurred, as especially when I had conversations with my homestay hosts on the island. Usually at the end of the day during the national news hour on television, they would translate what was happening or they would translate what a pastor was saying on the 24-hour Christian television channel.

Because of my talanoa/ interview-based approach method to collecting data, I had to transcribe my interviews and organise them into the two major thematic areas that I had proposed initially; which was "Challenges to Advocacy" and "Strategies". Within these two broad themes, a number of other themes had arisen. I looked for iterations; similar challenges or employed strategies that these women took. Together with the help from my supervisor I identified sub-themes, categorising my transcribed data as such. The [sub] themes became more apparent as I sifted through them. Furthermore, guiding frameworks, such as the article from Najam on NGO-Government relationships[120], were important to this process as it helped me categorise the sub-themes and to make sense of the data I was handling. This was the most challenging part of my research, in organising and filing together with the consideration of the methodological frameworks that I had employed from the start and in ensuring that I brought the voices of the participants to the forefront.

[120] Najam, 2000.

Chapter 4 Challenges to Women's Rights Advocacy

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss three important challenges that I identified during my talanoa sessions with women's right activists in Tonga. The first section is religion, culture and traditions. While these are distinct social institutions, in contemporary Pacific Islands society, they have become intertwined and inextricable from each other. The discussion in the first subsection is tricky because the women often use these three concepts interchangeably and so I have made them one whole concept as culture and traditions have adopted the values of the Christian religion and vice-versa. It is these values that have become hurdles that women's rights activist struggle to reconcile with, as the general perception of women rights is foreign and often is opposing to that of already established social norms and values. The second subsection is a discussion on the general social structure of Tongan society. I briefly outline the highly stratified context from the royal family to common everyday people and provide a brief outline of gender relations to locate the place of women within these structures. On the one hand, they are highly placed before their male kin and on the other economically disadvantaged by the same kin. The discussion mainly is to illustrate how difficult it is to be a woman and to access land, a resource which is an integral part of afore mentioned structures, and which remains a major source of debate and tension in women's advocacy work. And lastly, I discuss how some times, working within an umbrella, like the Women's Coalition of Tonga, can be a challenge as each women's organization has its set agendas and framework. Specifically, I look at the Tongan Family Health Association (TFHA) and how their work- to attaining the free and safe abortions- were hindered under the process of negotiation between the Women's coalition and reservations made by the Tongan Government on that certain article. If decisions at a coalition level, which is purported to be more effective in dealing with issues does not necessarily reflect the interest of all their members, then this could be seen as a challenge to women's rights advocacy.

4.2 Religion, Culture and Traditions.

> *"we need no rights, as God's rights is the first right, that is our Tongan culture, women's place is in the home" (*Lusi, Personal communication, 2016*)*

Religion in Tonga is almost palpable. This is observable on different levels from imagery to personal encounters within the country. One just has to walk on the streets of Nuku'alofa to see the prevalence of the Christian faith, cathedrals, churches and even a University for Christ in the central business district. In many encounters with people and even at official occasions, opening prayers and the foremost mention of Jesus Christ is a must. According to the 2011 census report, 88% of Tonga's population identify with the larger orthodox churches, such as Catholicism and predominantly with Methodism.[121] Religion plays a major role in influencing and affecting the lifestyles of people in various societies. In women's rights literature, religion is often cited as a major hindrance to advocacy work; 1) because in the global south women's rights frameworks are still quite novel and 2) because this framework works against already institutionalised norms and values. Most importantly, Farrior notes that these norms and values are often used as justification for crimes such as gender-based violence and discrimination against women.[122] The demonstrations that were organised by women's religious groups in Tonga provide a vivid example of how deeply rooted these norms and values are. Despite the convention being in the best interest for women, CEDAW mostly impedes on already existing cultural, traditional and especially religious paradigms pertaining to gender; the majority of reservations made are often in consideration to existing cultural and religious laws.[123]

> "*…most challenges is the mentality. It stems from our culture. Where people have misused the bible. Because they believe the church leaders. When they see church leaders in our country they think they are god or something. And whatever the church leaders tell them, that's the right thing*" (Nessa, Personal Communication, 7th June, 2016).

[121] Tonga Department of Statistics, 2011.
[122] Farrior, 2009.
[123] Brandt & Kaplan, 1995/1996.

As seen above actors within religious institutions often perpetuate doctrines, practices and norms that often do not fit with the values of women's rights. Because religious institutions have long standing foundations that have entwined itself in other social structures and institutions such as culture and traditions that has evolved into a pastiche of morals and values that are hard to differentiate from religion- therefore the challenge posed by religion is augmented further for women's rights advocates. In Tonga, this intricate relationship between religion and culture and women's rights were highlighted repeatedly.

During my *talanoa* sessions with many of the women activists, they switched between religion, culture, and traditions as sources of challenges in their work indicating how these structures are intertwined in Tongan society. It is important to note this -specifically for my study and to avoid confusion- when discussing religion as a major site of challenge, that it cannot be divorced from culture and traditions in a Tongan context. To illustrate this, a conversation with a Tongan colleague of mine on the status of women's rights and in the workforce in Tonga nearly always ended with her stating that "we need no rights, as God's rights is the first right, that is our Tongan culture, women's place is in the home". It is not uncommon that my questions on women's rights would elicit such a response. During a very informal conversation with a woman who owns a small bed and breakfast hotel in Nuku'alofa which was started by her questions on the purpose of my visit to Tonga and upon responding, I was sternly albeit in a friendly way told that the first right is "God's rights" and that women's rights come later. Recounting that particular conversation with one of my participants she stated,

> "*It's the interpretation that people have taken over the years and those interpretations that are so narrow… have become engrained in so many people*" (Ana, personal communication, June 2nd 2016).

It is challenging for women's rights groups to organize their work sometimes in Tonga due to the publics' perceptions of the kind of values and the issues that they advocate for. The public and the lay woman herself often sees women's rights organizations as carrying foreign values and ideals which oppose culturally internalized images of Tongan womanhood, not to mention *fakatonga*, "the Tongan way" in general. Women often are the major actors in the differentiation process of

themselves from men, such as the differences in gender roles, and because they play the major role in the upbringing of children, are the perpetuators of these ideals. Douglas noted that women's engagement in Christian settings often seems to advance the hegemonic missionary, male and national agendas of conversion, domestication and modernization rather than empower women.[124] Furthermore women's self-policing of their various identities within their social milieus is a major set-back to women's rights advocacy work in Tonga as there is a perception of the self, of womanhood that must not be changed or for that matter challenged. To be a woman in Tonga is to act within the means of ascribed social norms; to be a good housewife, to attend church and follow religious teaching, to uphold customs of the Tongan people, child rearing.

Perhaps one of the most documented challenges faced by women's rights activists vis a vis their professional roles is the representation of women as inferior to men which stems from historical and religiously grounded perceptions related to the regulation of sex and sexuality, and gender roles stated above. Ecclesiastical doctrines on how, when, and with whom (married) women can bear children with is a form of social control used to perpetuate patriarchy and the relegation of women as unclean.[125]

These religiously inspired principles regarding the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of bearing life often weigh women down in terms of the added societal pressure of staying in what may be abusive relationships and is one of the major practical implications in the line of women's advocacy work. Speaking with a woman activist she recounted the general experience of abused women who seek help through the church,

> "*like the talatala (priest/pastor), they can really be the mediators to some of those families and quite obvious that they are the first stop that some of these women coming into share…they come in and share…okay lets pray and then you pray about you forgiving your husband and you know, so the talatala would be praying for the woman who already have [sic] a broken heart to forgive the man who have been the cause of the whole problem and then you are making that poor*

[124] 2002.
[125] Htun and Weldon, 2015; Driver, 1976.

woman feel like she has been the cause. So that whole system is still need to be looked at" (Mere, personal communication, 21st June 2016).

More specifically religion and religious actors can be seen, as regulators of culture and traditions that specifically pertain to women. One of the key events that illuminates this was when on the 22nd of May 2015 the country of Tonga saw organized protests in relation to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW). The opposition to CEDAW came from different interrelated levels, the most observable and striking was the protests organized by religious women's groups, namely the Catholic Women's League of Tonga (CWLT). I conducted an interview with one of the board executives of the CWLT to find out about the event and some of the factors that had caused them to mobilize demonstrations.

"*You know how Catholics are against CEDAW… that's one of the doctrine of the church, that like abortions… how do you call it? A man marrying a man, a woman and a woman… and we were told that the church will stick with this (i.e. their stance on CEDAW) … we can't allow the change… not only is it the doctrine of the church but Tonga is a small country. If we… Catholic women said… if we agree to that that means we are allowing our sons and daughter to do likewise…"* (Mele, personal communication, 15th June, 2016).

During the time Tonga was in the process of ratifying CEDAW, Tonga gained its first Cardinal. Bishop Soane Patita Paini Mafi was ordained in March of 2015[126] at the Vatican achieving a milestone for Catholics, not only in Tonga, but in the wider Pacific region. Some women activists have stated that the ratification of CEDAW was untimely because of this event:

"… *That period that was like a huge masu (prayer) for Tonga. And the Pacific because he was the first cardinal appointed in the pacific* [an incorrect claim by the participant]*, so you know it was a huge affair, and everyone was proud of the moment and you know, it's historical for Tonga. So, it wasn't ideal that, the CEDAW discussions occurred around the same time, because it was the Catholic Church that was against CEDAW. So, because the Catholic Church was against*

[126] RNZ, 2015.

CEDAW and the cardinal had spoken up on behalf of the church leaders, it was like a done deal that it wasn't going to be ratified. Right, everyone just said like look the cardinal, who's gonna question the cardinal?" (Ana, Personal Communication, 2nd June, 2016).

The sentiments by Ana above on questioning the authority of the newly elected cardinal resonated in my conversation with the executive of the CWLT, a devout catholic she mentioned,

"*Do you know how Catholic, whenever the Cardinal or the priest make a decision, that's final…"* (Mele, personal communication, 15th June, 2016).

The cardinal made it clear that the Tongan Catholic church was not supportive of the ratification process. According to a media report around that time:

"*The Cardinal says that CEDAW states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, which is already clear enough in Tonga's laws and is forbidden in Christian churches. He says the nation's motto "God and Tonga are my inheritance" highlight fact that God is first. The Cardinal says therefore everything has to go accordingly with God's plans and not what the United Nations wants. He says the church does not approve of the convention because some of the clauses in it are in conflict with the church's beliefs, like abortion and same sex marriage.*" (Radio New Zealand, 21st March, 2015)[127]

No doubt when institutions such as the church have already developed deep roots within a society purports a certain world view, it is difficult to change the mindsets of the masses of people that have already subscribed to it. Women's rights where a woman is equal to man that by ordinary is contra to one's own culture and traditions then begins to present challenges that have now moved from the macro level to - where the processes of making meanings out these new values are personalized on- a more micro level. I had asked many of my participants about the view of women's rights organizations and how the general public had viewed them, Lisi for example,

"*I think the general view I have noticed is… is that majority of the public are still trying to get used to the idea of gender equality here in Tonga… because to a*

[127] RNZ, 2015.

very large extent many of those… particularly in the communities… feel that there are no gender issues here in Tonga" (Lisi, personal communication, 7th June 2016).

When dealing with issues of gender it is important that one understands the relations between men and women. Tonga has a unique structure of gender relations that professes the importance of a woman within a kinship network. The myths of the first *Tu'i Tonga* illustrate the model for the social order of Tongan society that had gender distinctions at its core in the creation and transmission of mystical/secular power and authority.[128] *Kainga (*family*)* relations show that a brother pays tribute to his older sister, who has given him her powers of authority, in terms of nurture and providence. This relationship is called *Mahekitanga*. Mahekitanga is the female within the paternal *kainga* towards whom individuals in the *kainga* owe the greatest respect; she is usually the eldest sister of the father or father's father.[129] Since women are elevated above men in this structure[130] many believe that there are no issues present. Reiterating this point, Lisi pointed out,

"*I think when they say that there are no gender issues they are specifically referring to some of the cultural privileges… that women have here in Tonga*" (Lisi, personal communication, 7th June 2016).

This system, however, creates its own gender issues in which certain women are disadvantaged or even women in one role are disadvantaged while privileged in another role. One activist explained:

"*The cultural status is misinterpreted because we have the fahu system and the mehekitanga system, which is inconsistent- inconsistent in terms of it's only the eldest sister, so if there are four sisters the fahu only goes to the eldest sister. And it does not translate into her being a wife. So, you could have all the respect from your brother but once you get married your husband treats you like crap, you know*" (Tupou, personal communication, 8th June 2016).

[128] James, 1996.
[129] Wood-Ellem, 1999.
[130] Helu, 1999.

However, according to my participants, this contradiction is not problematized for the Tongan woman, who has become complacent in addressing the issues that arise within their cultural systems. Meyers highlights two concepts that are useful to understand this: first order desires and second order volitions.[131] To conceptualize using the Tongan example of the fahu system, a first order desire of a woman is "I want to own land, to help raise my financial status"- which in Tonga is impossible as only men can inherit land- adverse to longstanding tradition, while her second order volition would be (taken from Meyers[132]) "I need to get married soon.", her resolve, given that she lives in an oppressive social context which undermines her autonomy, would be "no man, would want to marry a woman who tries undermine his respect by taking away his ownership of land." Given this scenario, a Tongan woman has modelled herself according to a rationale that complicates the work of women's rights advocacy work. Furthermore, in constantly modelling herself to the norms and values that have been regulated by institutions like religion, Meyers[133] notes women become compliant and docile, and many often portray their behaviours, like Mele above, as fully voluntary and natural. On the other hand, the autonomy of women must never be underestimated as these are the- as Kandiyoti puts it- patriarchal bargains.[134] This is where women work within a set of concrete restraints or in other terms classic patriarchy.[135] The acceptance of the veil by women in Arab countries, the ongoing reception of bride prices and dowries during marriages, have certain purposes, since many women in the South depend economically, if not wholly, on men. Thus these women have worked within a system that continues to oppress them and ironically- just as Meyers has stated above- women have become perpetuators of their own oppression because they already have vested interests in the system.[136] Just as women in Tonga have protested against a convention [CEDAW] that is supposed to benefit them, so did Chinese women against the 1950 Marriage Law where they were to be the primary beneficiaries- instead opting for the [already in place] traditional way.[137]

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[131] 2002.
[132] Ibid
[133] Ibid
[134] Kandiyoti, 1988.
[135] Ibid
[136] Ibid
[137] Ibid

4.3 Land and the Physical/Economic Status of Women

Tongan society is one of the most stratified societies in the South Pacific given the presence of the last surviving definitive monarchy in the region. This is another major site of challenge for women's rights advocacy work in Tonga. During my stay in Tonga it was observable to spot the affluent, often the ones who own large estates and drive the biggest cars. My hosts at that time, a young professional couple (who are commoners), were the ones who had alerted me to this issue on a drive down from Fua'amotu Airport. I would like to note here that when I speak of 'commoners', I refer here to what the people of Tonga- through my talanoa- refer to themselves if they are not of noble or chiefly heritage. It is not meant as something that has demeaning connotations- as in the past when differentiating between the masses and nobility- but something that the average Tongan would say in relation to them and that of their chiefs, nobility and the royal family.

Michael, the husband, who works in the Prime Minister's office is a self-identified pro-democratic reformist, is sceptical about the whole hierarchy and attitude of the *general commoner*. In conversation he once told me that the Tongan people's attitude- which is subservient in his opinion- toward the Royals and *nopele (*nobles*)* of the country is quite wrong and is such that it hinders Tonga's development. The general structure, informed through my *talanoa* sessions with my participants- from highest to lowest raking- is The King and his immediate family, extended kin of the King, a number of noble families who are further ranked, chiefs and then the commoner. Social status in Tonga is based on a separation between *Tu'a* and '*eiki, tu'a* being lower ranking than '*eiki.*[138] This ranking is applied, like gendered relations, on all levels in Tongan society, so not only is the King *'eiki* within his *ka'inga* or kinship group but a commoner husband is *'eiki* to his to his wife, sons and daughters, and so forth. This pecking order –highly engrained in the psyche of people- creates the disparities between the social levels of Tonga and works as a huge impediment to people of *lower* social status and especially to women because

[138] Volkel, 2010.

these relationships determine a woman's access to resources and hence the level of mobility within structures.

I have provided this wider structure of nobles and commoners to mainly place a woman in the larger scheme of the Tongan social context. A woman who comes from a privileged background is fortunate enough to have a fair bit more access to resources and opportunities whereas the common woman in Tongan society does not, an impediment to their social, financial and economic status.

When addressing issues of financial and economic status, and social mobility, the biggest marker in Tonga is the ownership of land or at least a close affinity to owning land. "*Some important points to understand about the Land Act of Tonga are that all land is the property of the Crown. The landholder's interest in any hereditary estate, tax allotment or town allotment exists as long as that person is alive and consideration often has to be made for any heirs*." Land has long been an issue in Tonga, the ownership of land, as exemplified above, illustrates that the majority of the land is owned by the crown and/ or nobility. [139] This has always been the case from the beginning of the Tupou Dynasty, where King Tupou the First, had unified all of Tonga and drafted/ enacted the constitution of Tonga in 1875- in it modern land reforms that allowed and allocated more rights and ownership to the crown and the nobles.[140] The Tongan land tenure system has had little to no change, this saw the pro-democratic movement and resultant riots in 2006 take place, forcing the Government and then King to take necessary but small steps.[141] The present government is the first commoner led government with Akilisi Pohiva at its head, however decisions are still subjected to the King's Privy Council and to traditional Tongan law regarding land.

As I have mentioned, Tonga underwent a democratic reform where executive power is now led by the country's first democratically elected Government and led by Tongan's first commoner Prime Minister, Akilisi Pohiva. This change in the type of executive is a step forward in light of addressing the way in which Tonga had been governed previously giving more representation to Tonga's common people since 2010. However, these decisions are subject to the approval of the King with the

[139] propertytonga.com, n.d.
[140] Kennedy, 2010.
[141] Ibid.

advice of his Privy Council. The Privy Council is made up of a number of Lords/ Nobles that are currently within parliament as they have been allocated a total of nine seats in the twenty-five-member legislative assembly. Given the relative novelty of a commoner led majority within the legislature, nobles have become foes to the decisions made by the Pohiva cabinet; the ratification of CEDAW receiving one of the biggest backlashes he has faced. Upon discussing issues with one of my participants, she illustrates the opposition quite aptly,

> "*Well you know he was known as the reformist and the big democrat… he has got his rivals, he's got the people who absolutely cannot stand him, so that was the first faction that was against CEDAW." (*Ana, Personal Communication, 2nd June, 2016*).*

Perhaps, like with other elected governments, whose existence within the legislature depends primarily on popular votes, a backlash from a highly conservative community is one of the major fears. This in some of the advocates' opinions is one the challenges to the work surrounding CEDAW and women's rights in general. Nessa who is one of the most prominent women's rights figures in Tonga tells me how it is,

> "*The leaders in the parliament. Because they have the power! They don't need to listen to all this nonsense of the church leaders and all that… they are the ones who make the decisions in parliament … and also because of fear because if they support CEDAW they won't get into the next election. And also fear of losing their votes. They were trying to please the church leaders and the people listen to the church leaders and who are the voters? It's the people! So, it's the fear of not getting into parliament the next one, fear of getting rejected by their voters, just fear that's it! Don't have guts! These parliamentarians don't have guts!"* (Personal Communication, 7th June, 2016).

The Government's reservation of article 15 of CEDAW, related to the equality of women and men before the law and specifically on equality on the rights to own land, is the resultant of the view by Nessa and many of her peers. Siale has a more diplomatic response to my questions surrounding the government's move to ratify the convention and the opposition by traditionalists or those within the Privy Council,

"*And then you have the crown law who has been part of the previous government… who had been like the key organization who have raised up the whole issue on reservation, has triggered the whole discussion to go haywire. So, you have a whole lot of different players. And some players are not happy to be leaving the other players alone. So, you would also see the transitions of Tonga from a, through a democratic process. That you see that CEDAW trigger that whole… exposed the gaps in that transition. Because you see when you have things that people, who would be in the political arena feel that the government will run with it… they would go back, they would fall back to the old system and try and bring the monarchy into it. And when you have the monarchy in Privy Council decided that there should be more awareness programs… Either the PM can stand up and challenge and say whether they still have that power or that they would just like bow down to maintain that whole peace*" (Personal Communication, 21st June, 2016).

It is not unknown that women in Tonga- whilst being able to lease land- do not and cannot own land and will not change in the years to come, according to a participant:

"*we can write in a cabinet paper asking that we please relook at the specific legislations with regards to land rights and then if approved by cabinet we can work with crown law and then the relevant organizations into amending that particular legislation… I have to be honest and admit that it's not going to be easy and it's probably not going to happen in our lifetime*" (Lisi, personal communication, 7th June 2016).

Land ownership is hereditary, meaning the oldest male heir inherits the piece of land that his father has owned, and in some cases has leased. In many families where there is no male heir, land is passed to the father's brother or his oldest nephew. Elizabeth, a women's rights advocate who is facing this predicament, shared:

"*It's pretty unfair and that men can only be the heirs to the land... Especially with our situation… my eldest sister isn't the heir to my dad's land which he was farming for our use and what not… it's now his brother who is the rightful heir… anyway… I don't think it's right that only men have access to owning land… women then can lease land... for over 75 or 100 years… which we have done with some of our land now… but it still doesn't belong to us rightfully… which a lot of*

people bring up… as an excuse that we can't own land… it's like I know but you can lease…and lease isn't very costly… but how we're addressing it umm … for an example, my dad.. or every Tongan man has an api kolo [Town allotment] and an api uta [Farm allotment]… so his api uta he has given to his nephew… and now he is his has his api kolo which is still under my mum because she is his widow… so because we have no sons… it has to go to his brother… we wanna [sic] keep it…" (Personal communication, 13th June, 2016).

Many women share Elizabeth's sentiments and yet many women are not as privileged to have access to land. This was one of the major pushing points and ultimately the breaking point for women's rights advocacy work regarding CEDAW. The right for women to own land did not coincide with cultural, traditional and constitutional law and hence was one of the reservations by the Government. This is a challenge at the institutional level, but it trickles down to grassroots levels as women become vulnerable.

"*For the women that we have been working with… none of them … and they don't even have any social assets to improve their connectivity within their families"* (Siale, Personal Communication, 21st June, 2016).

Siale, with whom I was privileged to interview, comes from a family that where all the women were fortunate enough to get education and to have access to land highlighted the average women's vulnerability as opposed to her social standing and of the generations of women before her,

"*because I feel my great great great grandmother had ensured that influence had gone from not just her but her kids… her daughter had the same thing… and their daughter had the same thing… up till now… so our family it's no longer a weird… it has become a practice* [having equal opportunity as her brothers]*…My whole thinking of that changed when I started working in civil society… because we started working with vulnerable women who had no education, who comes [sic] from a family that doesn't give them as much support… so those have really extended my thinking.. Okay I maybe in this extreme here... and now with the women's work we are involved in have a few or many other women who are at this extreme… so me thinking that we women have the same opportunities as men, because I grew up in this environment is not really there… so that's when*

the whole work that I have been involved in believing that there are women out there that don't have the same access to opportunities as some of us… and that has been the main challenge…" (Siale, personal communication, 21st June, 2016).

Ana- in contrast to Siale's situation- who is the sole breadwinner for her family expresses her worries regarding the whole land issue. She has, with her money built a house on the land that her husband has inherited from his father, but this leaves her worried because ultimately her house is on land that is not hers,

"*Over the last 13 years of our marriage I have done all the major renovations to our house, I bought all the furniture, I mean monetary things right? Because I am the one that's working so it's expected of me. But if he was* [sic] *to turn around have file for divorce or have an affair, whatever… I get nothing. I am to leave the home, he moves in with his new wife and if he dies, his new wife has the rights of caretaker. I have no rights at all. Now we are wanting to build this year… So, I will be taking out a loan to pay for the renovations, yet I have no rights to it*! [Laughs] *I have no rights to it, I have no rights to the land. My three daughters have no right to it. So, everything, what we're building this year and all the loan payments goes to that little boy you just saw that walked into here. Everything goes to him!*" (Ana, Personal Communication, 2nd June, 2016).

Strikingly through my *talanoa* sessions with my participants, many women in Tonga have come to accept the nature of their predicament and many a times have lobbied against the advocacy work of women's rights groups, in relation to CEDAW. Stating that it is *fakatonga* that men have rights to the land as they are -by gendered norms- the ones who work the land and relates to the complacency that I have discussed in the previous subsection. A personal encounter with another of my Tongan colleagues, who is a Masters candidate at the university which I attend, reiterated how the land is and always should remain in the possession of man, which is very different from what Ana and many of her colleagues believe;

"*With the land issue, I always take it on a personal level, because it's such a controversial issue in Tonga and people have arguments, you know through, using biblical texts, and surprisingly, for you, because it's not surprising for us,*

that women themselves were against it. Any amendment to the land law, they prefer the land law as it is. Umm, it's such a patriarchal like loyalty! *And you know that increases men's privilege and power over women, you know the land issue. It allows them to have that hold against their wives.*" (Ana, Personal communication, 2nd June, 2016)

This is not to say that the commoners and especially women are socially immobile because of the hierarchical nature of their country or because the majority of land is owned by Royalty. Education remains an important means of mobility, where for example Tonga has the highest number of PhD holders per capita in the region.[142] Many commoners have migrated to other countries and are supporting their families back home. Furthermore, they have access to land by way of land leases in order to start farms and or build property. Nevertheless, the issue of land and the associated relations of gendered and class power it implicates remain an important target area and area of challenge for women's rights advocacy.

4.4 Working Together?

I would postulate here, that Identity Politics or rather its limitations are a major challenge to women's groupings in Tonga. Taylor argues that individuals' identities are partly shaped by the recognition or the absence of or the misrecognition of others, inflicting real damage.[143]

Under the Women's Coalition in Tonga, which is an initiative that is set up by the WAD, women's groups come together to discuss issues that affect them and make sure that their niche areas of work do not overlap with that of the others to ensure that work is not replicated and or contradict one another.

"And at the end of the day we want to confirm that we're all working on the same page and that we're not duplicating work and that we're all heading to the same goal…" (Lisi, 7th June, 2016)

[142] Teague, 2007.
[143] 1992.

Having an *umbrella* coalition to work under is an effective strategy it also poses disadvantages. Identity Politics has come to denote an eclectic scope of political activity and theorizing set upon the shared experiences of injustice and inequality faced by individuals of certain social groups that have been marginalized within their greater constituency.[144] Feminist movements have used this term quite extensively operating on the primary notion that personal experience is a source of political understanding; an important tool based on the premise of sharing individual experiences to develop an awareness of women's oppression[145], hence the sharing of personal experience applies across the spectrum of marginalized communities enabling mobilization. Simply put, under the larger umbrella of women's identity politics, there has already been a development of a set of core values and principles that these groups aspire to, needless to say that the inclusion of different marginalized groups of people would be ineffective and these core values and principles are subject to change. Given the multiplicity of core values, principles – and in this case working within certain frameworks-women's rights movements face a major challenge. It is evident as seen with in Tonga- and the rest of the Pacific- a plethora of women's groupings and movements that have arisen, each having their own set of core values or agendas.

To provide some context, the Women's Coalition- as a strategy- has come on board with the government's decision to reserve certain articles within CEDAW. Specifically, Article 16 of CEDAW relating to family and family relations; this was due to the protests organized by the country's religious bodies. The general perception being the ratification of CEDAW and this particular article was that it would lead to same sex marriage and abortions. However, this has contradicted the niche area of the TFHA that works on the SRHR of women. Hence this caused a fissure between the women's rights organizations namely between the Tonga Family Health Association (TFHA) and the Women's coalition. Speaking with me on the reasons why the TFHA had not come on board with signing the agreement, a disgruntled participant stated,

[144]Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2012.
[145] Connolly, 1990.

"*How can you target women? Women's health, most dear and near… How can you reserve CEDAW, our articles? I am not going to support you* (the Women's Coalition)" (Mafi, Personal Communication, 15th June, 2016).

She goes on to say,

"*Look here… Did they really consult these people? Community level? They are in denial… there was no proper consultation with people… This is our favourite slogan when we do our advocacy at the ground level, "*E 'ikai ngalo ha taha" … *"No one gets left behind" … I think it's applicable be it CEDAW or whatever, you need to do it properly… I go with the pop (*majority*)*" (Mafi, Personal Communication, 15th June, 2016).

The dynamics of civil society organizations (CSOs) is one that is often contradictory and complicated than acknowledged by advocates and critics alike.[146]The contributing factors to this issue usually stems from identity politics, power relations and existing inequalities between different CSOs and within them resulting in their inability to formally and informally organize themselves[147]to mobilize core values and principals. Individuals may get involved in CSOs based on its affinity with their identities, appealing to a shared sense of purpose or responsibility; conversely some may be denied that experience of involvement because of the non-existent mutuality of shared identity and experiences.[148] Thinking from a very practical viewpoint and mainly because the TFHA already works within the international framework of the IPPF, advocacy on the access to free and safe abortions is part of their work.

Furthermore, in some instances these values and principles are controlled by individuals who have the means and resources to do so.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at religion, tradition and culture as a whole phenomenon that is intertwined. It is important to note this because since its introduction, the two have been meshed, that the point of reference from which values and moral emerge have

[146] McDuie-Ra, 2007.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

become obscure- they have become interchangeable to an extent, as seen in my talanoa with the activists. The values that these institutions purport is often in conflict with women's rights work. Furthermore, since these are institutions that are so grounded it is often difficult for women to change the perceptions of the people toward their work, which is often apprehensive since women's rights are an introduced concept in Tonga. The monarchy is a structure that has been reinforced by religion, culture and traditions. It is also a structure from which gender relations have been formed- as seen in the legend of the first king of Tonga. While gender relations ensure that women are placed in a highly respectful place within society, these only extend as far as kinship between a brother and sister. Complicating these gender relations more is the fact that land ownership is purely androcentric, not to mention. Land is part and parcel to these relations. This is problematic to women's rights activist because of the way in which all these systems work as a whole and have been engrained into the Tongan psyche as practically, access to land is a challenge for many women. These challenges are long term challenges, as one participant put it, that will be solved in the next generation or another. The last challenge I highlighted in this chapter is of organising. While working under an umbrella coalition is mostly advantageous, sometimes it is also a hinderance to the agendas of certain groups of people or organisations. But this does not mean that women's rights activists cannot organise and successfully implement their advocacy work as you will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Strategies of Advocacy for Women's Equality in Tonga

5.1 Introduction

Evans suggests that advocacy is in fact various strategies that seek to challenge the perceptions of people and inspire them to demand change to societal ills.[149] Among wide ranging advocacy strategies that are employed, a few dominant ones are research and analysis grounded to inform, raise awareness and challenge assumptions; lobbying relevant stakeholders engaging in the process of policy development and implementation; alliance building which involves a combined effort and partnership with other organisations, governments and law enforcement to reach a singular understanding and goal; and effective communication which is the use of technology and mass media to create visibility, raise awareness and change discourse.[150]

In understanding the strategies that women's rights activists and organizations utilize in Tonga, I use a broad framework by Najam who proposes that in the realm of policy making, there are four resulting CSO- Government relationships that are illuminated by *ends* (goals) and *means* (strategies): 1) where both are similar- cooperation, 2) similar ends with dissimilar means- complementarity, 3) similar means with dissimilar ends- co-optation, and 4) where both are dissimilar- confrontational.[151] This model is one of the best known heuristic models developed by third sector researchers in the Global South[152], and thus is an appropriate tool to examine the work of Tongan women activists. As far as a co-optive relationship between government and NGOs in Tonga is concerned, there were no examples of overt co-option by either institution. Within each of these relationships- wherever relevant- I integrate the paper by Stanley who identifies 3 central strategies that are employed by NGOs and are common to the working of most NGOs around the

[149] Evans, 2005
[150] Evans, 2005; Moghadam, 2007.
[151] Najam, 2000.
[152] Taylor, 2010.

world: 1) The use of advocacy and lobbying, 2) raising awareness and 3) service provision.[153]

5.2 Confrontational Relationships: CSOs Vs. Government

> "*You know NGOs will be NGOs they will like to attack government every now and then but you know that's their role… that's their mandate*." (Sala, Personal communication, 7th June 2016)

> "*And this is quite interesting because we don't always have government and civil society working together because often we are on different sides of the road. Because we had already been working on CEDAW forever and nothing had progressed…*" (Sivoki, Personal communication, 21st June 2016)

NGO-Government relations are often confrontational, as it is in the nature of NGOs to be the "watchdogs" for people at the grassroots level providing assistance bottom-up. In relation to Najam's conceptual model of the NGO-Government relations, a confrontational relationship is seen when both the preferred ends and means are divergent.[154] It is important to note that a confrontational NGO-Government relationship is defined not only by the coercive acts of the government but also in the opposition and defiance of certain government policies by NGOs, making them forces of resistance.[155] This is seen in the case of the ratification processes- more so the reservations to certain articles in the convention- in Tonga. Pacific Island countries [PICs] face external pressures from larger, more "developed" countries and international organisations- such as the World Bank, United Nations and its different agencies- to align with international/global human rights standards. For many PICs usually, - and I write in broad strokes- the alignment of their own national human rights policies is to fulfil the prerequisite to get funding and aid, a periphery-core relationship discussed in development studies. Such actions suggest a different end goal.

[153] Stanley, 2012/13.
[154] Najam, 2000.
[155] Ibid.

For the Tongan Government the ratification of an international convention such as CEDAW- as with any other country globally- brings their national policies and legislative framework in line with international obligations whilst having reservations to particular articles, such as the equal access to ownership of lands (land rights laws), to preserve their traditional land tenure systems. On the other hand, women's rights organisations ultimately seek the equality for women in every aspect including but not limited to the ownership of land by women. In the case of Tonga, what highlights this confrontational relationship is the way in which the government seeks to address CEDAW and the way in which the women's organisations seek redress on the reservations made.

Sala is based at the Women's Affairs Division at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Tonga, a department that caters and looks at the needs of women. She also coordinates and liaises with the women's NGOs within Tonga. When asked about strategies regarding CEDAW; she tries to reconcile the convention and the constitution and the land rights issue.

> *"We would work at it from the policy level and the legislations... so if we were to ratify CEDAW and even if we don't ratify… we can write in a cabinet paper asking that we please relook at the specific legislations with regards to land rights and then if approved by cabinet we can work with crown law and then the relevant organisations into amending that particular legislation… I have to be honest and admit that it's not going to be easy and it's probably not going to happen in our lifetime.*" (Sala, Personal Communication, 7th June 2016).

Her comment that change will probably not happen within their lifetime highlights the problematic nature of dealing with land rights in a country where only men can inherit land, a practice strongly informed by tradition and customary land laws. When policies promote gender equality, essentially, they are seeking a fundamental change in the social make-up of any society and therefore challenge the patterns within the state-society, religion, cultural groups and the contours of citizenship.[156] The government of Tonga and the Women Affairs Division approach such issues from a top-down perspective. The women's organisations then face an obstruction on all levels, from legislation down to grassroots level perceptions. Perceptions – a

[156] Htun and Weldon, 2010.

major challenge, as seen in the last chapter- is where most of the work is done, as this informs and would drive (for) change. The *means*, as compared to what Sala has stated about how the Government of Tonga would address land rights issues (or lack of), are therefore inherently different from the women's organisations. Many a time, when polices and laws are passed at the national level, people at the grassroots level are often unaware of the implications that they pose on them and women are the most disadvantaged groups. Therefore, women's groups use a bottom- up approach.

> "*the way I get around the land issue is I always talk about my personal story, because just no one can argue against it, because it's my story and you are quiet because you can't fix it. And the only way we can fix it is if we fix the law*." (Ana, Personal Communication, 2nd June 2016)

For many NGOs, lobbying and advocacy from the grassroots level up often "translates as policy advocacy, seeking social change by influencing attitudes, policy and practices [and] seeking to reform state services."[157] NGOs employ a diverse range of advocacy; one such is the cultivation of partnerships with the wider community to lobby for changes in certain legislation. The lobbying process is supported by the active participation of its survivors. Such is the case in South Africa where the NGO Rape and Crisis Cape Town Trust tracked survivors through the courts systems to identify how sexual offenses legislation is being administered and whether the changes they have successfully lobbied for are working.[158] The WCCC in Tonga has a similar process of lobbying legislation not by the active participation of victims, rather indirectly through the experiences and anecdotes of these women within state service providers like hospitals, the police and the courts system. The active engagement with participants makes available vital information on whether legislation is working, its need to be reformed and if the reforms work.[159] This contributes to the confrontational relationship between women's NGOS and the government in Tonga, whereby the limitations of the legislations and state services are highlighted. Ana of the WCCC provides a vivid example of how she advocates for a reform of sexual offences legislations in Tonga. Basically, she provides intense

[157] Stanley, 2012/13.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

accounts of violations such as rape and the loop holes in Tongan law that does not necessarily protect victims to create consciousness raising among citizens.

> "*So, we give an example, so we give a story like, so a girl has been raped, and then we tell them the situation currently with the laws in Tonga, so she comes to the crisis centre and she tells us that… she was gang raped and, she says there were four perpetrators. And the four perpetrators used objects anally on her… she tells us that that's what happened to her. Then we have to say to her that unfortunately as the law stands in Tonga, it's not rape that happened to you, its sexual assault. Because rape laws in Tonga requires penile penetration. So, the medical report has to prove that the penis entered the vagina and that there was impact. Right so, because yours happened anally, its not rape, its sexual assault, which means it's a much lesser penalty*." (Ana, Personal Communication, 2nd June,2016)

She recounts this story to the public when talking about the need to ratify conventions like CEDAW and the need to reform certain legislations that protect women in Tonga. Stanley's paper argues that there is a high prevalence in VAW mostly because of how gender roles are constructed and understood, that the male control and notions of male sexual entitlement strongly features in the dominant social constructions of masculinity[160]. The article links this dominant social construction to the under reported and under-recorded incidences of VAW. Researchers have found that many women do not or were unable to refuse sex with their husbands, as many women in South Africa do not consider forced sex with their husbands as violence or rape[161]. This deeply entrenched view is problematic to NGOs as it has been internalised by women and normalized in a wider societal context. Ana of the WCCC wants the people of Tonga to change their perceptions of VAW in all its forms. As my talanoa sessions are based on the issues surrounding the ratification of CEDAW, the strategies of advocacy and lobbying employed by the women's organisations in Tonga are arduous as it is change that begins from the grassroots-up. Change is slow but it is when people begin to question the system and

[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

the laws, through powerful stories, that Ana then ties in how international conventions like CEDAW are important to be ratified in the Tongan context.

> "*So, I am just giving that in a nutshell because when we explain it that way we then ask the people who we are training, what do you think is wrong in that story? And then they'll say well you know, the rape law. "Well that's rape, you know if that was me, that is rape…" then they'll say, "I don't wanna sit around the hospital for 6 hours… I want to be dealt with straight away!" "I don't wanna be asked several times about what happened to you [sic], why can't I just tell it once and then you people deal with it?" And you know I said, that's exactly under article... whatever of CEDAW and the say that's what we're trying to improve the processes and the systems. And the only way we could improve that is the Government, through government commitment. Through the ministry of health to say right, there is a system in place where someone comes in and says I've been raped this is how we're gonna deal with it, this is the process, right now we don't have that in Tonga. Right now, we can't move to change the definition of rape because there no government commitment towards it*." (Ana, Personal Communication, 2nd June, 2016)

In terms of means specifically, CSOs are more susceptible to relying on social media platforms which have increasingly become spaces for advocacy and - more importantly –illustrating the shortcomings of governments around the world facilitating a confrontational relationship further; however, the use of social media is not limited to NGOs/ civil society as governments are increasing their social media presence. Stanley's paper illustrates the use of social media and global communications by NGOs.[162] As the world is becoming more and more interconnected, social media has become a platform that has efficiently brought [and is bringing] issues to the forefront with great efficacy and speed. In the South Pacific, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become spaces for advocacy. As noted by Finau *et al.*, the advent of technology in the South Pacific has had significant social, economic and political implications as people are more

[162] Ibid.

inclined to hold relevant stakeholders accountable.[163] In the case of the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance the use of online platforms such as Facebook illustrate the issues that young women all over the Pacific are facing and ways in which to engage in policy process.[164]

> "*…keeping it visual, getting the correct role models in place to advocate for what we're doing through imagery… with simple messages and simple statistics if we can… so that's what we're doing now at talitha…*" (Peta, Personal Communication, 13th June, 2016)

Besides the use of the conventional advocacy and lobbying strategies in Tonga, the use of social and communications type media are gradually becoming popular- more so with youth who use the platforms often. The Talitha project which engages youth across the country finds it often an advantage using social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. It is not only an efficient way of disseminating information- regarding their advocacy work- but it is also efficient in capturing the attention of this targeted youth population. Instead of overloading youth with information – especially young girls- on topics like gender equality and women's rights, the Talitha Project is making these concepts more visually accessible via their online Facebook page.

5.3 Cooperative Relationships

> "*Some influence [sic] people they have status, like the PM himself and some ministers while some are not, so we are making most of the opportunities that they have where we can dialogue… we grab the opportunity using that to… advocate for things that we want… And some of our NGOs, we work together, come together in the coalition, because we really do understand, you know that saying… No man's an island, we cannot do things on our own… we need to collaborate, we need to have partnerships and do the close network with others*." (Sila, Personal Communication, 13th June 2016)

[163] 2014
[164] Brimacombe, 2017.

In the paper Najam[165] defines a cooperative relationship is likely when government agencies and NGOs share both similar policy goals and prefer similar strategies for achieving them. An important element of Najam's model is that he negates the power symmetry- that is, the perceived "need between NGOs and the Government to be somehow equally powerful and in complete agreement to be collaborative, stating that where both means and ends are in sync neither will consider the other's intentions or actions."[166] This relationship is seen between women's organisations and particularly the Women Affairs Division (WAD) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Tonga. This is common when NGOs and government ministries partner up and develop policies to the processes of implementation. The participation in the activities of the WAD, from an NGO perspective, can also be seen as a strategy. And given the challenges faced- mostly how women's NGOs are perceived- by the women's organisations in Tonga, the partnership between the two is the most effective advocacy strategy. Sala spoke on the role of the WAD at the women's stakeholder forum that was held during my research stay in Tonga.

> "*So technically we need to be coordinating their activities, we are planning to hold a stakeholder's forum and so the whole idea with regards to the forum is to bring in all the relevant stakeholders and to share with them the work that we're doing with regards to the gender policy. Because everybody needs to be working and implementing the gender policy... because this is what is used to formulate the varying reports… such as the UPR (Universal Periodic Review) ... and other reports that we need to submit to international agencies… and anyway because we also want to hear what they're doing and to for them to know what we're doing. And at the end of the day we want to confirm that we're all working on the same page and that we're not duplicating work and that we're all heading to the same goal and so the initial intention of having that stake holders forum on Thursday…*" (Sala, Personal Communication, 7th June 2016)

She went on to state,

[165] 2000.
[166] Ibid: 8

"*That's something that I pride… that area that we try to work very very hard on… keeping that friendly relationship with our NGOs… You know NGOs will be NGOs they will like to attack government every now and then but you know that's their role… that's their mandate… and so as watch dogs we need them.*" (Sala, Personal Communication, 7th June 2016)

At this point it is important to state that Najam's model on the different relationships between Government and NGOs is not limited to being one or the other, rather government-NGO relationships exist on a spectrum. They can simultaneously be confrontational and cooperative, and this is because it depends on the situation and the stances taken between the two on issues at hand. Both governments and NGOs navigate this spectrum according to their individual agendas. Such is the case in Tonga. To highlight this, Sala from the WAD stresses the contribution that women's organisations have had in consultations on national policy- from its development stages to implementation. The Family Act 2013 and the National Gender Policy are resultant of cooperative relations between the two. In being very involved with gender work carried out by the WAD, women's organisations manage to influence the direction that it takes. For example, the Family Protection Act of 2013 provided greater protection of women and children and promoted the safety, health, and wellbeing of victims of domestic violence. This act also clarifies the duties of law enforcement agencies such as the police[167] which in itself illustrate the results of the advocacy work that women's organisations lobbied for as discussed in the above section.

Sivoki, who is based at the Civil Society Forum of Tonga, furthering on what Sala had said, highlights the strength of partnership between NGOs and government for women who run for local government and support for directions post elections.

"*I think that has become an inspiring thing for me because like the work that we do now, with the women who are running for the local government, for district and town officers… we support these women through a coalition work… so it's civil society, women's affairs in government and other individuals. They decided that okay… we agree on doing the same thing… so the first thing that we identify*

[167] Family Protection Act: Kingdom of Tonga, 2013.

is our purpose, is to get these women into town offices and district offices positions. The second one is okay if they don't make it… it's okay that because we are supporting them to stand up and we will continue to support these women to stand up and it will come to a point where these will become a normal practice… for any of the women and for any of our daughters who decide overnight to stand up and run for offices and parliament or whatever… that it is not a weird thing that it is a normal practice…" (Sivoki, Personal Communication, 21st June 2016)

A more specific example of a cooperative government-NGO relationship, where both end goals and means are similar often leads to the successful implementation strategies and the resultant outcomes. As part of their goals to get more women into decision making positions, I find it important to illustrate successful advocacy work. The local government elections that took place on the 29th of June, which saw about 18 women who ran for District and Town Officer positions, yielded positive results for the women and all the stakeholders who were involved. The Tonga Electoral Commission confirmed two District Officers and the first ever female Town Officer for Tongatapu; furthermore, there were four other women who placed in second positions which allows them to be deputized and in acting District and Town Officer positions.[168] The talanoa sessions below illustrate the work leading up to the local government elections and the cooperative relationship between the WAD and the women's organisations in Tonga.

The local government elections are the "stepping stone"[169] on which the women's organisations and the WAD work cooperatively from to empower and encourage women to stand for the national elections which will be held in 2018. This highlights an important strategy where women activists navigate the political terrain that is normally dominated by men.

"*And so, this is probably what I am meaning in just kind of working around it and working within the system…. So, if we can get women into these key positions we're hoping that they will be women who will be advocating for women's rights.*" (Sala, Personal Communication, 7th June 2016).

[168] Ministry of Information and Communications Tonga, 2016.
[169] Sala, Personal Communication, 7th June 2016

In navigating the political terrain and working in the system, Sivoki makes an important point about their meetings with government and church leaders as an advocacy method; showing them their mapping (as above) and showing support from CSOs. This is because those actors are the traditional, cultural and political heads of the country.

> "*We had been visiting all the church leaders, or some of the church leaders that we access them personally one to one… we have been attending church leaders and the government and we have been in there making… to provide information if needed… we had hosted a dinner for the PM and cabinet ministers. Who we felt the cabinet ministers need to be informed of why believed in and why we supported… and we also wanted them to believe that there are some people out there who are supporting their work. And this is quite interesting because we don't always have government and civil society working together because often we are on different sides of the road. Because we had already been working on CEDAW forever and nothing had progressed... okay let's go ahead with the reservation provided by the crown law… and then we also highlighted some of the other work that related to CEDAW that shouldn't be a concern… in the health act there is already something on abortion there… where of the life of the mother has been challenged by the baby in delivery then… there's provision for the doctor to make that decision. So that's the kind of advocacy we have been, very much working on the one to one, targeting the individuals who have a cultural and traditional influence. But as a coalition we really sit around and decide what information need to go to where and so when we go out we talk on the same page*" (Sivoki, Personal Communication, 21st June 2016)

To drive a point, I argue that women's NGOs include institutions like church and their leaders, leaders in the community and the government because it is important that they are aware of the positions, values, and points that women's organisations are trying to make on the status of women. Given the nature of Tongan society and the highly placed values of these institutions as opposed to women's or rights-based organisations, it is important that these key agents to societal dynamics are included in women's advocacy work. The purpose is simple, to try and cause a paradigm shift – in Tongan society – to the attitudes toward women and their issues.

Instead of only being in a confrontational relationship with the government, women's organisations see it important to work together, mainly because there needs to be constant progress on the various issues. For example, in issues like CEDAW, the women's coalition had agreed to the reservation provided by crown law on surrounding land rights and inheritance. In supporting government and women's related work that they are doing it is believed that there is a higher tendency of the government reciprocating women's organisations and their work. It is an advocacy method of working with the tide rather than against it and stagnating. In most instances this is a way of moving forward in dealing with pressing women's issues.

5.4 Complementarity

Najam states that a complementary relationship is likely where NGOs and government agencies both share similar goals but different strategies. He deviates from but does not reject the idea that complementary relationships are where there is a one-way flow contractual type of financial resources from the government to NGOs. Instead he defines it as a function of ends, where the purpose of both- government and NGO- is not just the procurement of resources but the provision of services.[170] Based on his means-ends model the notion of Najam's complementarity in the service provision arena is where NGOs move in to fulfil a function that the Government does not want to or cannot perform.[171]

In the case of the women's organisations and the government of Tonga, complementarity often develops into a cooperative relationship. This was seen in the capacity building of the potential women candidates before the local government elections. Because the WAD works relatively closely with the NGO sector in Tonga, many a time the division sends out teams- from the NGOs- to conduct training with the women in different islands. During my research stay there many of the women activists that I had wanted to *talanoa* with had all been away on the outer islands conducting training and workshops. For instance, the WAD on the 9th of June had

[170] Najam, 2000
[171] Ibid.

sent a team out to Vava'u to conduct training with the women candidates. Part of this reason is that the WAD wants women to get into these spaces and not only be aware of overall national issues but specifically women's issues. The Women's NGOs then become the capacity builders because it suits their advocacy and overall interests. Training women to ensure that they get into spaces and positions of decision making are some of the ways of mainstreaming gender into some of the policies of line ministries.

> "*Once the government takes on an initiative, for example if they include gender into their policies then the NGOs, the privates sectors they will take that into their policies. So, it'll trickle down in to other agencies*." (Sala, personal communication, 7th June 2016).

With the whole CEDAW ratification and the issues that arose, through my *talanoa* sessions I saw that the women's advocates through their various NGOs or collectively under the Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT) have taken it upon themselves to inform the public about what the convention is about and the processes involved, something that any government should undertake through public consultations. For example, consider what Sivoki from the CSFT, says:

> *"But I feel that the whole CEDAW drama, you would have whole lot of people changing their perspectives on CEDAW after the whole drama and everyone was talking about nothing else but CEDAW, then you have the public debate the radio show, and so the more they talk, the more they hear about the different… and we started sending out the translated materials on CEDAW and so you have a lot more people, so it's a, it works both ways. It created that public interest within the public, when you provided that information and some people read about it, well of course some people read it and make up their mind in whatever way but then it's created that whole curiosity within…. So, we use it as just an opportunity to find out more. The whole religion radio… there's nothing else but CEDAW… and they dig up all sorts of bible verses to go against CEDAW. But then you also have men, who are every night, they go out to a grog party, to a kava party… and because when you go to a kava party you want to come in with a fresh topic to discuss so you see them reading, you see them, trying to impress the rest of the men by coming in and having something to share and talking about… so it was*

quite interesting… but I am glad that there has been some women who had been part of the coalition who have come forward to support and I think providing the platform of the coalition means that we don't identify a particular person… … … so the coalition is sort of a safe space for some of the women who wanted to share their views and wanted to have an opinion but because they don't want to be targeted so they come to this platform so they are, nobody knows who is in the platform but when we have statement going out, they can be part of a petition… those kind of things come from a platform rather than just individuals so it's a little safe space for some of us…" (Sivoki, Personal Communication, 21st June, 2016)

The CSFT has used the opportunity of the negative perceptions regarding CEDAW to inform people of what it really is while there was high interest on the topic, even men at their kava circles were observed talking about the issue. While the issue of CEDAW is highly spoken about, it is important to note that the CSFT provides a safe space for women to speak out. This is because some of the women, who had openly come out in support of CEDAW were targeted by the opposition as being antithetical to the values and morals of Tongan society. In some instances, the children of these women were bullied in schools and were called "your mother is a CEDAW".[172] Together with the space and anonymity of the CSFT these women were able to actively engage in advocacy work. Furthermore, these platforms that are being used as a safe space allowed women and girls to negate the worries of being targeted and as spaces for empowerment. As Peta mentions,

"…to empower them (young women young girls) and also for them to become real correspondents in their communities…" (Peta, Personal Communication, 13th June, 2016)

Stanley's study tells of three components that are strategic and practical in raising awareness programmes 1. They try and change attitudes, 2. They encourage dialogue and 3. These awareness programmes publicise the services available to the public.[173] When NGOs raise awareness they employ prevention strategies which focus on

[172] Sivoki, Personal Communication, 21st June, 2016.
[173] 2012/13

"changing socio-cultural attitudes which underpin gender-based violence."[174] As a central theme in my study, the challenges faced by women's rights activists in a highly cultural and traditional society, changing perceptions is a highly talked about issue. Raising awareness about the issues that women face in light of current socio-cultural norms features prominently in the work that women's organisations undertake in Tonga. At the time of my research stay, The Talitha Project highlighted three awareness programmes that they were currently conducting; The Young Women Speak Out programme; a radio broadcast show where youth call in and discuss the issues that they are facing. Discussions at that time surrounded the prominence of violence in high schools as a group of girls from prominent rival schools had been brawling; and the use of Digicel, one of Tonga's cellular network providers, to send out promotional text messages relating to women's rights and issues.

> *"It is part of our "young women speak out" …That's my vision to teach the young people at an early age, so they can grow up with a different mindset you know… I think that Tonga will be a very different Tonga if we invest in empowering the young people and inspiring them and giving them all this knowledge and information at a young age so they can grow up different*." (Mere, Personal Communication, 7th June, 2016)

The Young Women Speak Out programme allows a synergy of young women aged 14 to 18 years to get together to raise and discuss issues that they feel they as young women are facing. In contrast to the older generation of women, many young girls, who are exposed to the training and awareness workshops conducted, are better informed about their rights and are calling for the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The programme focuses on five thematic areas which are gender-based violence, trafficking, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health rights and HIV and AIDS. I had the opportunity to observe the latter part of a session on the anatomy of the female body, where the Talitha Project worked in conjunction with the Tonga Family Health Association by bringing in an expert to speak to the young women and girls about their bodies, sexual reproductive organs, contraception and sex in general. It must be noted that issues like teenage pregnancies, the high

[174] Ibid: 296

prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases and sexual assault and rape are often a consequence of treating sex as a taboo topic. However, strategies do not only yield results in the youth demographic.

> "*How do you know about the centre? The most answer we heard is… because we heard your radio programme…"* (Eta, Personal Communication, 14th June, 2016)

> *"Women are coming out and openly share…*" (Sivoki, Personal Communication, 21st June, 2016)

Women who face domestic violence cases were never inclined to report their husbands or partners, because they are very dependent and because of the socio-cultural perceptions surrounding marriage and families; also, usually women who spoke out were often displaced, shunned by their husband's families. With the provision of safe houses, the Family Protection Act 2013 and a lot more policies targeting gender issues women are becoming more open than they have ever been in Tonga and are able to take a much stronger stance. As a result of utilising radio broadcasting by many women's organisations, the WCCC has noticed that women have become more aware of the services that the women's organisations provide. Marking the International Women's Days celebrations last year, the WCCC organised an expert panel allowing women from all over Tonga to call in and discuss wide ranging topics to which they received perspectives from counselling to what the police could do. The statistics of domestic violence continues to grow and many women's organisations and activists relate this to the awareness programmes that they are conducting and especially to the services of safe houses that they provide.

5.5 Concluding remarks

The use of each of these relationships in Najam's framework illustrates the importance that women's NGOs in Tonga place in interacting with the government- whether it be a confrontational, complimentary or cooperative relationship- and is a

major strategy for the women's organisations. The result of a cooperative relationship had positive outcomes, especially in the formulation of the land mark "*Lao Ki He Malu'i' 'O E Famili 2013*" or the Family Protection Act of 2013 and the success for women candidates in the local government elections, 2016. Within a confrontational relationship, one observes the workings of women's rights advocacy, from lobbying policies and legislation at a national level to advocating in traditional grassroots spaces to try and change perceptions and attitudes towards women. Furthermore, working in complement with the government, NGOs are able to address the limitations of the government in providing training programmes, which again saw women being elected into decision making positions in the local government and also the provision of safe houses, counselling and legal advice to women who are victims of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

As I began my research journey, I set out with three objectives and three guiding research questions. My objectives were: 1) to understand- from a women's rights activist's point of view- the challenges faced, 2) to analyse - from a women's rights activist's point of view- the structures in society that hinder their advocacy work; and 3) to record how these women's rights activists have evolved their advocacy work to suit the Tongan context. These objectives were, in part, shaped by the events of the 22nd of May 2015, where I had read about the protests against CEDAW, mainly by religious organisations and religious women's groupings in Tonga, and by my postgraduate studies at the university. This led me to ask three questions 1) What are some of the greatest societal factors hindering women's rights advocacy work in Tonga? 2) How have women's rights activists in Tonga adapted/shaped their advocacy work to suit the Tongan context? 3) What are some of the key challenges they face in shaping advocacy?

6.1 Main Findings

6.1.1 Challenges of Religion, Culture and Traditions

I have discussed two key social structures that hinder women's rights advocacy I observed during my talanoa sessions in Tonga with women's right advocates. One of the most prominent societal factors that hinder the work of women's rights advocacy is the fact that there is a strong presence of religion. Religion- as I have mentioned before- is not a singular entity, in many Pacific Island countries, rather it has engrained itself into other elements of social structures such as tradition and culture. Furthermore, it has engrained and intertwined itself into many other facets of society. The challenge of religion, culture and tradition to women's rights advocacy has been documented in many different contexts.[175] In Tonga, women discussed how this affected the ratification of CEDAW and essentially their niche areas of work, such as social and economic equality and sexual and reproductive and health rights. Specifically, this convention has two articles that are contradictory to already grounded Tongan norms and values (regulated by Religion, Culture and Tradition);

[175] Patel, 2006; Chari, 2009; Farrior, 2009; UN Women, 2014.

the first, was article 15 related to that of land rights and second article 16 relating to family and familial relations.

And as I have discussed in Chapter 4, the continuation of religious rhetoric on gender norms and values, more importantly the place of women within Tongan society, is a major site of challenge of organising for women. This also is a site where women's right activists have to shape their advocacy without impeding on the religious values and views of the people. However, this has not stopped major Christian denominations from denouncing the work that women's organisations have done. The example that I have provided above is but an example of how this has impacted women activists and their daily lives.

These views are also supported by *faka Tonga,* or "the Tongan way." Women are seen to have traditionally existed in the private sphere where looking after general family affairs, going to church and making sure that they uphold this way of life in the generations to come. Perhaps one major contradiction to this is the number of women employed in the work force and the number of educated women with PhDs per capita is one of the highest in the world. Women have since crossed over from the private sphere into the public sphere- because of the agency that they have to do so- to gain equal ground with men in the workforce yet still hold on to norms that are traditionally prescribed to them. It is hard then to reconcile the perceptions that have already been engrained into these people to women's right advocacy. But this is not to say that it is a uniquely Tongan trait.

6.1.2 Social Stratification and Access to Land

The other major hindrance is how stratified Tongan society is: the monarchy which comes first, then religion, then the ruling government, followed by elite commoners or business people and then the general masses. What is most important in this discussion is where the women are situated in this structure and how women's rights activists have worked within this system. A lot of women, through my talanoa sessions with activists, state that they are protected through the cultural Fahu and Mehekitanga systems where women are taken care of by their brothers and their

brother's families. For example, if there was a death in the family, the Fahu or older sister would preside over the funeral as the most highly placed member of the family. She would then be presented with mats, tapa and food because of her rank at the function; the same goes with any other family gathering. While it is safe to accept that generally Tongan women are highly respected and regarded through their fahu and mehekitanga system, important tensions and conflicts ensue when attempting to reconcile this with the women's rights framework and the equality that Tongan women's activists are pursuing. This is because while the mentioned relations go as far as the kinship between a brother and his sister(s) and their immediate families, it does not: 1) protect a woman from domestic violence or rape by her husband or others and; 2) provide her with ownership of land- two recurring issues brought about during my discussions with activists on the topic.

A major example highlighted in this study through the activist participants is the issue of land. Land is a highly talked about topic in the Pacific as it is something that indigenous populations identify with. It is more than just an economic resource, more so a part of identity formation attached with all the rules, norms and values and regulated by institutions such as the church and elements of tradition and culture. Furthermore, the ownership of land is regulated by a patriarchal system that is the Monarchy and its hereditary system. For example, the three-legged stool[176] complex on which Fijian society is built in is an appropriate example to use as well as in the Tongan context because these three structures; the church, land and the government (or a governing body such as royals, nobles or chiefs); form a stable and entwined body by which society is governed. The land being the economic source of its people, the source of which people sustain their livelihoods, a place of identity.

It is thus important to note that while Tongan women are able to lease land, the land is inherited by male heirs and thus women can never actually own it. Women further are not granted tax allotments for farming purposes because traditionally it is not the role of women to do such labour. While land ownership has always been this way and has worked for Tongan society, the implications on women are many. In addition, in the context of (rapid) social change in Tonga and other Pacific Island societies, customary sources of social protection (including family, distribution of

[176] Williams, 2008.

communal and gendered obligations and responsibilities) are withering. For instance, the most basic unit such as the family is no longer what it traditionally used to be. There are women who are single mothers, who are the breadwinners for their families, a change from the normative husband led households. While this is the reality on the ground much of [current] culture and traditional norms and values, as well as legislations do not reflect this. The most obvious consequence of this situation on women is a lack of socio-economic stability and security.

The implication for women's rights advocacy in Tonga then, is traversing between worlds where one is highly traditional and cultural while keeping up with changing times in another. They must shape advocacy so as to suit what many women around the world are striving to achieve, in both the private and public spheres but also keep in mind the context in which they exist. While in the realm of advocacy work, navigating and shaping advocacy to suit one's context is not new, what this study illustrates is the personal experiences of women's advocates and their daily struggles against structures of oppression. What is highlighted is important not only in that it shows what women activists experience but also from the specific sites of challenges that they face. Furthermore, it points to the challenge of advocating across different power structures that order gender relations and women's status.

6.1.3 Strategizing Around Challenges

To understand how women activists strategized and shaped their advocacy work in Tonga, I utilised Najam's Government- NGO relational framework on means and ends.[177] Within this broad framework I show- by use of Staley[178]- three central strategies that complement each government-NGO relationship. I utilised this framework because much of the work done by women's organisations in Tonga is aimed at legislation and policy change, where engagement with the government is paramount. Tongan government and NGO relationships are contentious, on the one hand while they are seen to be working together, policy and legislation shifts are often in opposition to what women's groups are pushing for.

[177] Najam, 2000.
[178] 2012/13

A confrontational relationship between the government and women's groups is highly evident when it came to the issue of the land. This was because many women's organisations where lobbying government to change existing legislation to afford women the same right as their male counterparts when it came to the ownership of land. Because land is tied to so many cultural and traditional values and the norms, the government of Tonga under pressure decided to make reservations to this specific article. It must be stated that the Women's Coalition had accepted that fate but at the beginning lobbied the government by a bottom up approach. That is, activists had taken it upon themselves to seek social change at a grassroots level to thus influence change in attitudes, policy and this reform. Much of advocacy done by these women's groupings is targeted at a community level as this is a place where the one is able to measure the impact- or lack of- of state policy. It is also a site to address the short comings by way of illustrating individuals' experiences with state services such as hospitals, police and the court systems. The lobbying was not only limited to the issue of the land but also other pertinent issues facing women. Many of my participants highlighted the prevalence of VAW in Tonga and how there are loopholes in Tongan law that does not protect victims.

Through their discussions it can be seen that much of the Tongan population is in denial about their VAW issue but given the statistics there is a continuous rise and a dire need for conscious-raising. In the first ever study on VAW done in Tonga it was found that about 79% of women and girls experience physical and or sexual violence in their lifetime.[179] Conscious-raising was brought about by communication media and social media, two very wide-reaching platforms. Social media has proved to be the most effective way of disseminating information to the younger generation of people through sites like Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The Talitha Project that deals with young women and issues that they face utilise these platforms regularly. Youth are attracted to social networking sites largely because of the number of peers that they have on it and also because it has become a source of information- keeping up to date with the "in things." Organisations like the Talitha Project have capitalized on this by mainstreaming their advocacy onto these different platforms. They have done it in such a way that young girls are able to relate and share it to their networks-

[179] Ma'a Fafine mo e Famili, 2012.

and this is how they advocacy has gained traction. Together with that the Talitha Project and the WCCC have partnered up with telecommunication companies like Digicel Tonga to send out tit-bit like information via promotional texts. This ensures far reaching advocacy since many people are on mobile devices and smartphones.

We see in Tonga that many Tongan activists shape their advocacy according to standard advocacy tool kits. In lobbying the state and other public bodies, women's groups demonstrate their agency to influence policy development, implementation or reform.[180] This is a major strategy for groups around the world and a goal that needs to be attained to achieve social change. An important observation that I had made in Tonga was the Tongan Women's Coalition that compromised of women's NGOs and various Government departments, police and women from the court systems, coming together to flag issues in their niche areas of work and compile a strategic action plan. This forum is regulated by the Women's Affairs Division under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and is an example of a cooperative relationship between the government and NGOs. As a result, through this forum and consultations with various actors within the women's rights sphere, the Family Act 2013 and Gender Policy was established and enacted, enabling much more protection for women in Tonga. The awareness campaigns that were held before and after the enactment of the Family Act of 2013 resulted in women being more confident and coming out to report abusive spouses and partners.

Advocacy also is important in that it should empower people who are marginalised in the decision-making process.[181] Furthermore advocacy strategies should enable an environment where women especially are able to participate in effectively and influence political agendas. A cooperative relationship has resulted in and encouraged women to make a stand in the 2016 local government elections and also in the upcoming general elections. With the help of awareness campaigns and training workshops aided by women's organisations, women have been able to get into position of decision making- a major goal by women's rights organisations. This will foster more participation by women and encourage other women to run for offices such as these. The impact will see the decision-making processes, policies

[180] Womankind Worldwide, 2011.
[181] Ibid.

and legislation, have a more gendered perspective and analysis, which in the long run will help women. The capacity building programmes carried out by the women's organisations illustrate complimentary relationships between government and NGOs. This is basically because NGOs are fulfilling a service that the government cannot necessarily perform but have the same goals to have women in decision making positions. Because NGOs are often funded by international organisations they have more resources, materials and have the experts both locally and internationally therefore they are more suited to undertaking capacity building workshops.

While awareness campaigns and conducting information sessions are effective advocacy strategies, it does not work when there are no change in behaviours which generally lead to actions.[182] Women's groups are the archetypes in taking action. Within a complimentary relationship- discussed in Chapter 5- Tongan women's rights organisations take it upon themselves to provide services like safe houses for victims of domestic violence and rape. This is a service that has provided women with a safe space in which to seek out counselling away from the influences of family members, the perpetrators and people within the community. In this way women's NGOs empower women to get back on to their feet, find employment to make them self-reliant and look after their children.

6.1.4 Key Challenges in Shaping Advocacy

The perceptions of the people toward the work of woman's rights organisations is a negative one. The activists themselves attribute this to the fact that the concept is *perceived* as quite foreign to the people, including many of the women in Tonga. This impedes on the social, cultural, traditional and cultural makeup of their society that already has prescribed "ways of doing." But the negative perception is not only limited to the general values put forth, they are extended to the women's organisations and to the women activists themselves. This is one of the problems that women activists have faced, especially those that are the most active and those that

[182] Ibid.

are most outspoken. It has also encroached on to their family life where their children are singled out by their teachers and bullied by their peers in schools.

Another challenge is the workings of NGO coalitions. Building a coalition is both a strategy and also a key challenge when it comes to shaping advocacy. This is because there is a lot of negotiation as to what are the major problems affecting each organisation's niche areas of work and ways in which to address that. A lot of the time it is difficult to meet the needs and wants of every organisation under a coalition because as an umbrella there is an agenda and key goals that can be met at any one time. This was seen in how the coalition had dealt with the ratification of CEDAW and the reservations that had been agreed to by the government and coalition. The coalition had come to an understanding that it was in the greater good to have the convention passed with reservations to articles relating to land and family because in the long run it was better to work on these issues with the convention in place already. On the other hand, there were a few women's groups who had not agreed because it was areas that they have already made tremendous progress in.

6.2 Limitations

Despite the fact that this study focuses on women's right activists in Tonga - who are in women's groups and organisations mainly and are the primary actors in women's rights advocacy work- there are still many voices that are missing in the narrative of this study. These for example are women in churches who are working for gender equality, such as those in the Catholic Women's League who are silenced by decisions made by organisation executives. Furthermore, this study did not document the voices of men in the area of women's rights advocacy work or those that actively support women's rights work.

Women's rights activists have been defined in this study through an organizational framework, common to studies in social movements, third sector and civil society. However, those individual women who work in their own communities, workplaces, homes and families to effect change in women's lives, their voices are not represented in this study.

The language and cultural dynamic is also a limitation. Despite coming from another Pacific Island nation, the cultural dynamic and the distinctions of Tongan culture and traditions are not fully realised and or understood completely by myself. Faka Tonga can only and wholly be understood and appreciated by a Tongan. Being an English speaker, language itself is the biggest limitation; as such many every day interactions which are integral to understanding the nuances of faka Tonga were not accessible to me; importantly, the participants I spoke to do not include the voices of those that may not speak English, and therefore, who may have access to distinct advocacy experiences and worlds.

My being male impacts this study, from my standpoint to my interactions with activists. However, the study that I have conducted is valuable in the sense that I have, in my full capacity as a women's rights activist, illustrated the challenges that women's rights activists face in Tonga- which is the most important. It also makes way for many other activists to develop research aimed at bettering the rights and condition of women. Given the limitations stated above there is a need for more contextualised work on in the future. Not only do the experiences of activists who are professionally involved in advocacy work of women's rights need to be told but also those that are working in every sphere of society for the advancement of women's rights. Furthermore, for this study– to reach its full potential in telling the stories of women- it needs to be developed for and by Tongans, only then will the stories of women's rights activists be wholesomely told.

6.3 Way Forward

While this study has answered my research questions, it has opened up further areas of investigation and raised more questions into women's rights advocacy in the South Pacific.

1. A similar study has to be done, on a larger scale. This would really communicate the stories of the women activists in relation to their social context. The new study should include women activists in all spheres of work related to

women's rights and development work- from grassroot levels all the way to international platforms such as the UN.

2. I have mentioned in the limitations that this study falls short in the language and cultural aspects. Further research from this study in Tonga should be done by a woman who is from Tonga. This would see an appreciation of faka Tonga and a really in-depth talanoa take place.

3. There also needs to be an investigation into how the Tongan church understands and talks about women's rights in Tonga, as there is a tendency to automatically assume that religions are automatically dichotomous with that of women's rights.

4. Furthermore, this study (based on points 2,3, and 4) can be replicated in other parts of the South Pacific. This would be to develop an understanding of the status of Women's Rights in the South Pacific and to understand the depth at which it is accepted- through the eyes of the women's rights activists.

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APPENDIX A

List of Organizations related to Gender

Name of Organization	Area of Specialization	Activity	Contact
NGOs			
National Council for Women	Gender in general, improvement of women's life	Advocacy for and awareness raising of women's rights, support for women through handicrafts making and marketing	P. O. Box 267, Nuku'alofa Tel / Fax: 25988
Centre for Women and Children	Women's rights, care of victims of gender-based violence, advocacy	Counselling and shelter for victims of gender-based violence, awareness raising	Fasi-moe-Afi, Nuku'alofa Tel / Fax: 26567
Women and Children Crisis Center	Women's rights, care of victims of gender-based violence, advocacy	Counselling and shelter for victims of gender-based violence, awareness raising, research	Fanga-'o-Pilolevu Nuku'alofa Tel: 22240
Tongan Women	Women's rights, Quota for	Advocacy	P. O. Box 2005 Nuku'alofa

National Congress	Legislative Assembly, CEDAW ratification		Tel: 63344
Catholic Women's League of Tonga	Gender in general, improvement of women's life	Support for women through handicrafts making and marketing, mental care for women	P.O. Box 304747, Nuku'alofa Tel / Fax: 27524
Tonga Family Health Association	Reproductive health/rights	RH/R, RH Clinic, support for single mothers	Vaiola Motu'a, Kolofo'ou, Nuku'alofa Tel: 22770
Tonga Community Development Trust	Community development	Women's development in rural areas, community credit unions, disaster prevention	Tofoa, Nuku'alofa Tel: 23478

Table extracted from Japan International Cooperation Agency (2010). Country Gender Profile: The Kingdom of Tonga.

APPENDIX B

Information Sheet

Navigating Social Structures: The Experiences of Women in Advocacy Work in Tonga.

Researcher: Mr. Damien Gock

Chief Supervisor: Dr. Sara Amin, Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, USP

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study, I am doing for my MA in Sociology. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

The purpose of this project is to investigate the experiences of women's rights activists and how they shape their advocacy work in the Tongan context. This project seeks to understand the challenges faced by women's rights activist due to certain structures within their society/ communities and record the ways in which they effectively shape their advocacy work to tackle women's rights issues within Tongan society.

You have been chosen to be part of this research because of your active role within a women's organization. This study has chosen women that are specifically women's rights activists because it seeks to record their experiences to answer the purpose of this study. I believe that the women specifically involved in the advocacy of women's rights have first-hand experience and are able to help me in answering these important questions.

As a participant of the study, you will be asked to share approximately an hour of your time for discussion. There will be a follow up interview, if there is a need, and you will be contacted accordingly. During your participation I will ask a few questions where we will both discuss your experiences and accounts of events that might have occurred during your role within a women's rights organization. There are no foreseen physical or psychological harm related to the study as a participant. As compensation for your time, depending on the time of the day of the interview, morning tea, lunch or afternoon tea will be provided.

The data collected from you is highly valuable, and will be kept safe under a password protected file in my personal hard drive. The data will be analysed and discarded afterwards.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used in any communication about this study unless you give permission for this to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when the project is concluded.
- "ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I cannot promise the study will have any direct benefit to you but the information we get from the study will help to increase the understanding of the experiences of women's rights activists and the challenges that they face in Tonga. This may support the work that you, your organization and other women's rights organizations are doing in Tonga and more broadly in the South Pacific. I will be happy to share a summary of the findings of this study with you if you so wish.

For more information about the study or project findings you can contact the following:

Contact Details:

Damien Gock

Email: s11078609@student.usp.ac.fj/ damien.gock@gmail.com

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APPENDIX C

The University of the South Pacific/ School of Social Science /Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Law and Education
The University of the South Pacific

Damien Gock

Email: s11078609@student.usp.ac.fj/ damien.gock@gmail.com
Phone: (+679) 9330 668, (+679) 3232 955
Fax: (+679) 3231 559

Navigating Social Structures: The Experiences of Women in Advocacy Work in Tonga.

Date: ___/___/2016

CONSENT FORM

I have read and understood the Information Sheet describing the above-named project. I agree to participate as a subject in the project. I consent to publication of the results of the project/the information given to me on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.

I understand that at any time I may withdraw from the project, as well as withdraw any information that I have provided.

I note that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of the South Pacific.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

(where appropriate) I am signing this Consent Form on behalf of the

whom I represent in the capacity of

APPENDIX D

The University of the South Pacific/ School of Social Science /Sociology

Faculty of Arts, Law and Education

The University of the South Pacific

Date: ___/____/2016

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Navigating Social Structures: The Experiences of Women in Advocacy Work in Tonga.

I agree to keep confidential all information concerning this project. I shall not retain or copy any information about this project.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date