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EXPLORING THE PROGRESSION FROM GAMES TO GAMBLING IN TONGA

EDMOND SAMUEL FEHOKO

University of Auckland

ABSTRACT: Until recently there has been little research on gambling in Tongan communities. While it is not clear when and how games with elements of gambling were introduced to Tonga, the longstanding presence of competitive gaming in Tonga is evident. This paper explores traditional games that were played by noble chiefs, like sika and lafo, and the introduction of Western games by missionaries, such as card games and darts. These include Tongan people's initial gambling participation through card games with parents and other family members in Tonga. Over time, new forms of gambling evolved which included the exchange of cash and different kinds of goods. The motives which lead individuals to engage in gambling activities are also explored.

Keywords: sika, lafo, bingo, card games, talanoa research method, Tonga, gambling, Polynesian games

This article examines the relationship between traditional Tongan games and gambling in contemporary Tongan society. Problem gambling is defined as a preoccupation with gambling which leads to a continuous or periodic loss of control over time or money spent on gambling resulting in adverse impacts for the gambler, and perhaps for their family or affecting their vocational pursuits and which may extend into the wider community (McMillen 1996). This article is part of a wider study that explored Tongan male perceptions and experiences of gambling in New Zealand—research that was aimed at understanding how gambling and problem gambling behaviours were learnt and transferred intergenerationally (Fehoko 2020). The aim here is to consider the social and political contexts of Tongan games, both those of ancient times and historically introduced ones such as cards and bingo, and how those contexts link with the emergence of problem gambling in New Zealand.

Some traditional Tongan games have very deep histories. For example, games feature prominently in the underpinning legend of the origin of the Tu'i Tonga, a tale well known today in Tonga. As one might expect, aspects of politics and hierarchy in this myth encapsulate chiefly understandings and values (Kolo 1990). This is evidenced in most if not all existing written versions of this myth (Lātūkefu 1968). The myth of the origin of the Tu'i Tonga explains why the Tu'i Tonga should be the one ruling in Tonga. It is a central

myth, as every chief traces his or her origin back to the first Tu‘i Tonga—the “first king”, the son of the sky god, Tangaloa ‘Eitumatupu‘a (Gifford 1929).

The story goes that the greater god Tangaloa ‘Eitumatupu‘a was captivated by an attractive woman on earth, Va‘epopua (Rutherford 1977). Tangaloa came down several times to court Va‘epopua, and eventually they had a son whom they called ‘Aho‘eitu. Initially Va‘epopua kept the identity of her son’s father a secret, but as ‘Aho‘eitu grew up he continuously begged to know who his father was, wanting to meet him. Eventually Va‘epopua gave in and revealed the secret. She pointed him to a *toa* ‘ironwood’ (*Casuarina*) tree that reached the sky and directed him to climb until he achieved the top. There he would find his father waiting for him. ‘Aho‘eitu ascended the tree and indeed found his father, who was happy to greet him. Tangaloa held a feast in his honour, and ‘Aho‘eitu was then introduced to his elder brothers.

‘Aho‘eitu’s celestial half-brothers were filled with jealousy and annoyance when they saw him. When playing *sika* ‘*ulutoa*¹ ‘spear throwing’ (Gifford 1929: 27), instead of aiming at the target, they aimed at ‘Aho‘eitu, killing him, and then cutting up his body and eating it. They then lied to their father about what had happened, but Tangaloa, knowing the truth, ordered them to vomit into a *kumete* ‘kava bowl’. Tangaloa resurrected ‘Aho‘eitu in the *kumete* and directed ‘Aho‘eitu to descend to earth as his representative and rule the people of Tonga as the Tu‘i Tonga. The brothers, feeling remorse for what they had done, pleaded for their father’s forgiveness and for approval to join their youngest brother on earth, promising they would serve him. Tangaloa honoured their change of heart and commissioned them as attendants and advisors (*falefā*) of ‘Aho‘eitu and his descendants. Furthermore, he ruled that the descendants of the eldest brother, Talafale, would continue the line if ‘Aho‘eitu had no descendant, but Talafale himself must not become king (Māhina 1993). This legend highlights the antiquity and importance of the traditional game of *sika*, played by sons of chiefs in ancient Tonga. While these competitive games are clearly part of traditional Tongan society, I ask what, if any, relationship these activities have to contemporary problem gambling.

While my doctoral study focussed on Tongan male elders’ experiences of gambling, and problem gambling in New Zealand, it was also an opportunity for these elders to reflect on traditional games that they had played with their families while growing up in Tonga, experiences they saw as “fun and social times”. But it was also clear that as these games became tied to money they bordered on gambling. For example, during a *talanoa* ‘informal discussion’ at a *faikava* ‘informal kava ceremony’ the general secretary of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Rev. Dr Tevita Havea, described how card games and bingo were played for money, and along with the lottery, were rapidly increasing in Tonga during the 1960s and 1970s (pers. comm., 7 July 2016). He described how Tongan men would cluster together at the

markets and engage in and bet on card and board games to win additional money to meet family needs. Furthermore, bingo is played over the radio, attracting a wide audience in both urban and rural areas in Tonga. Havea shared how he would listen to the radio with numbers being called out and hear people calling in to say that they had won. The anecdotal evidence shared by Tongan community leaders generated interest in considering whether traditional games played in Tonga were the precursors of today's forms of gambling. These activities and games with monetary rewards are considered to be a form of gambling.

METHODS

This study employed an interpretative phenomenological approach (Smith and Eatough 2007) using the lens of a Tongan worldview to determine what is of value and how it is known and shared. The cultural research tool of talanoa (Vaioleti 2006) was also employed as a way to collect and share stories for this study. The project aims were to bring these stories together in the Tongan norm of *fono* 'meetings' and in a process of co-construction of knowledge.

A qualitative approach also fits the Tongan value of *fetokoni'aki* 'reciprocity' or the core principles of "fair and ethical exchange", whereby the researcher and participants engage in a reciprocal sharing process (Daly 1992). Thus a qualitative approach allowed for this study to connect with multiple ways of knowing and engage in knowledge co-construction based in a Tongan worldview, which contributed to the cultural validity and integrity of the study (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001).

Participants

Recruitment of participants was through snowball sampling, from churches, kava-drinking circles, and other community spaces. A total of 22 *Mātu'a*, defined here as 'elders' (see Churchward 1959), participated in two focus group talanoa (FGT), with 10 *Mātu'a* in the first FGT and 12 in the second. Eight *Mātu'a* were in their 40s, seven in their 50s, four in their 60s and three in their 70s. Six *Mātu'a* participated in individual talanoa. All *Mātu'a* were Tongan men born in Tonga before migrating to New Zealand in the 1970s or 1980s, the majority as young men. Some participants were born in the outer islands of Tonga, and they mentioned early accounts of playing traditional games there before migrating to mainland Tonga and then to New Zealand.

Data Collection

Both English and Tongan were used in the FGT and individual talanoa, as preferred by the *Mātu'a*. Several *Mātu'a* in the individual talanoa used Tongan only. All talanoa were audio-recorded. Opening and closing prayers are an important part of any Tongan gathering (Lātūkefu 1968). After prayers and a formal welcome with opening remarks in Tongan, both the English

and Tongan versions of the participant information sheet and consent form were outlined and given to all talanoa participants to sign.

Sharing food and acknowledging the linkages between people are common practices in Tongan contexts (Lātūkefu 1968). Food was critical as a means of expressing reciprocity and acknowledging Tongan people for the time and space given to this study. This was vital in building and maintaining relationships, as the sharing of food plays a significant role in *tauhi vā* 'nurturing relationships' with Tongans (Fehoko 2015). Snacks were offered throughout the session and a meal was served at the end of the talanoa. *Me'a ofa* 'gifts' were offered in the form of gift vouchers. It is important to note that all Mātu'a were unaware of the gift vouchers beforehand, to ensure that this provision would not influence their decision to be involved in the study.

Data Analysis

As a fluent Tongan speaker, I carried out transcriptions of the FGT and talanoa and translation into English of any proceedings in Tongan. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) provided a highly flexible approach, which enabled me to gain a rich, detailed and complex understanding of the talanoa data. For this study, several themes emerged which were coherent, consistent and distinctive amongst both the FGT and the six individual talanoa.

A particular challenge with the Mātu'a was the prevalence of the Tongan practice of *heliaki*, a metaphorical level of communication where one says one thing but means another. It requires skill based on cultural knowledge, and many readings, to unravel the meanings underpinning *heliaki*. Following several intensive discussions with a Tongan expert in the use and the meaning of *heliaki*, I believe I was able to understand the hidden meanings of the metaphoric language and expressions used.

FINDINGS

When discussing gambling in Tonga, several of the Mātu'a referred to social activities such as card games, darts and billiards. While these games are not indigenous Tongan games, they have come to play an influential role in social engagement within the immediate family and with wider and extended family. The elements and values commonly shared by the Mātu'a and associated with these activities included having fun, relationship-building with family and a time for bridging generations (e.g., elders and young interacting together), and developing a sense of belonging as well as the learning and transfer of knowledge.

By way of contrast, when talking about gambling in modern times, more than half of the Mātu'a described the positive aspects of gambling in terms of monetary gains, such as winnings, that contributed to the greater good of the family, church and community. This was followed by socialisation

with friends and family and time out from responsibilities. While activities such as card games, darts and billiards may be perceived and experienced as social pastimes, it was clear that, for some, these social activities had elements of gambling, that is, playing for rewards such as money.

Some of the Mātu‘a said that it was important for Tongans to understand and know their limit and “only spend what you can afford”. However, almost half of the Mātu‘a commented that their winnings from their gambling behaviours were an equivalent to “hard work”.

‘Oku ‘i ai pē lelei ‘oku ma‘u mei he‘eku va‘inga pa‘anga. Taimi lahi ‘oku ma‘u ai ho‘o sēniti, hangē kuo ‘oatu ho‘o ola lelei mei he ngāue lahi kuo ke fai.

There are some positive results of gambling. For example, the winnings feel like getting a reward from the hard work that you have done.

The following subsections present the experiences of gambling on the part of Mātu‘a and how these behaviours were learned. These include the collective nature of games in Tonga, such as card games and traditional Tongan games. While these games were used for social bonding and fostering relationships, they also had gambling elements, which were later amplified after migration to New Zealand and being exposed to the betting systems of the Totalisator Agency Board (TAB) and electronic gaming machines (EGMs) in casinos and sports bars.

Traditional Tongan Games

It is possible that the social atmosphere and rewards of the traditional games tends to lure people into engaging in contemporary gambling activities. *Lafo* is an ancient Tongan throwing game, using *tupe* ‘discs made from coconut shells’. The sons of village chiefs would often throw the tupe in an attempt to land on the *paenga*, a long, narrowly folded mat specifically designed for this game. Rewards in traditional times consisted of yams, poultry or land.

Ko e va‘inga lafo ko e taha ia e ngaahi va‘inga na‘e manakoa ‘aupito ‘i Tonga ke ma‘u ai ha pa‘anga pe ko ha mo‘ui.

The lafo game was very popular in Tonga as it was a way of earning money and surviving.

In this game, competitors sitting at each end the paenga slide or throw the tupe along the length of the paenga, so that they come as close as possible to the end without falling off (see Figure 1) and at the same time knock the opponent’s tupe off the paenga. The word paenga is hardly used today because the game of lafo is rarely played by Tongans anymore, although the word lafo is used metaphorically to mean the tossing around of ideas.

It is important to note that such games were played by males and did not appear to be a female pursuit.

The story goes that there was a man named Tefuli who lived in Feletoa with the great Vava'u chief Finau 'Ulukālala-'i-Feletoa and who was a master at lafo (Mariner & Martin 1827). One day, Tefuli was selected by the Tu'i Tonga to be on his team for a game of lafo. During the game, the opposite team started winning. Tefuli was scared because if he lost the game, he would be punished by the Tu'i Tonga. In his last throw of the disc Tefuli won the game. Tefuli's technique for throwing the disc was new and impressed everyone, and that move came to be called 'aufua 'a Tefuli.

Lafo is also present in Sāmoa, known there as *lafoga*, where chiefs played for status and rank in the village. Figure 2 illustrates the equipment used for this game.

Several Mātu'a commented on how they had participated in games like lafo and *piliki*, lit. 'bricks', a game where children compete to collect the most coconuts in a given period of time. Everyone in the focus groups agreed that these games had elements of gambling, such as risk, chance, luck



Figure 1. Men playing a game of lafo in Vava'u, Tonga, ca. 1890s. Photograph by Thomas Andrew, Union Steam Ship Company. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, ref: PAColl-5426-15.

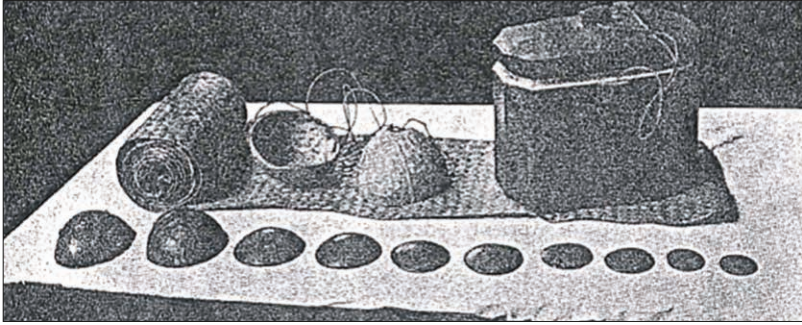


Figure 2. Lafoga, a Sāmoan game played by chiefs. Shell money is thrown (*lafo*) onto a mat (*falalafō*). Players are called *aulafo*. Photograph by A. Henry and F. Faletose, 1980.

and competition. Of the 22 Mātu‘a, more than a quarter of the participants commented that their fathers, uncles, siblings or grandfathers had engaged in dart games and billiards, which also included gambling behaviours. Some spoke of social pastimes such as piliki and sika as traditional activities that had been transmitted to them by their elders.

Ngaahi va‘inga kimu‘a he ha‘u ‘a e kau pālangi na‘e kau ai ‘a e sika. Ka ko e me‘aa ko e va‘inga pē ia ‘a e tamaiki ‘a e kau nōpele. Ka na‘e ‘i ai ‘a e va‘inga ‘a e kakai tu‘aa ne u fa‘a va‘inga ai he‘eku kei si‘ii ko e lafo ‘a ia ‘oku hangē ko e sipoti ‘oku fa‘a ‘asi he TV ko e ... lawn bowls.

There were games in the pre-Christianity era that had gambling aspects, like sika. It was only played by the sons of nobles and chiefs. But there was also a game that was played by commoners, called lafo, which is like the sport that usually comes on TV ... lawn bowls.

Hangē ko ho‘o talanoa ‘ave ‘a e piliki pea to e vakai‘i ha founga ke fakafoki mai ke ma‘u ha sēniti.

Like your piliki story, it was all about finding ways of stealing back your coconuts after selling them to someone for money or cakes and reselling them to get more money.

The majority of the Mātu‘a recalled how card games were a central part of their social life while growing up in Tonga. The notion of having fun in a social setting was said to bring a sense of belonging and connection with immediate and wider family. The playing of card games such as *talamu*

‘a form of whist’ and *suipi* ‘a mathematical game’ was identified by most Mātu‘a as a social activity, which not only contributed to the socialisation of their immediate and extended families but also provided a space where open talanoa and laughter was supported and exchanged.

Card games in Tonga was fun. It was not gambling, you know, because we had no money to gamble with when playing cards. But it was a good social activity that brings everyone together ... from all ages as well.

Ko hono mo‘oni, ko e me‘a ko e va‘inga pa‘anga ko e fo‘i va‘inga na‘e ma‘u ai ‘a e fiefia ‘a e kakai tokolahi tautefito ki he finemātu‘a ‘i ‘api.

To be honest, gambling is an activity where it’s all about having fun, especially when there are a lot of people involved.

Card games, *tokoua* [‘brother’], was awesome in Tonga, especially in the village. It was something that gathered us together under the mango trees enjoying the breeze and playing some talamu and *suipi* [laughs].

It is not like the cards today where it is a competition, but it was something that bought my family together to socialise, catch up you know ... to talanoa. It was awesome.

The playing of *suipi* and *talamu* was noted by several Mātu‘a to be evident in learning styles of local secondary schools in mathematics class. For example, one Mātu‘a shared how his teacher would shuffle the deck of playing cards and then invite two students to the front of the classroom. The teacher would place two to four cards face down and then have the students flip the cards over. The teacher would then say “multiply, subtract, divide or add” the numbers shown on the cards. This unique style was a popular method with the male students in teaching and learning mathematics.

Ko hono mo‘oni, na‘e kamata ‘eku manako ki he me‘a ko e va‘inga pa‘anga me i he ako ‘i he taimi ne u lautohi ai pea u toki ‘alu ai ki he kolisi, ne mau fa‘a va‘inga pele ai mo e tamaiki pea mo e kau faiako tautefito ki he kalasi fika. Ko e fakalata ‘aupito pea mahalo ko e me‘a ia ne u toutou ma‘u ai ‘a e kalasi fika koe‘uhī ko ‘eku manako he me‘a ko e va‘inga ... ‘ilonga lelei ‘eku ha‘u ki Nu‘u Sila ‘eku ‘alu ‘o kasino, ‘eku fiefia he sio ki he va‘inga tēpile he ko e me‘a ne u manako ki ai, pea ‘e ma‘u ai ‘eku silini [laughs].

To be honest, my love for gambling originated when I was at primary school before I entered high school. We often played cards with our teachers, especially our maths teacher during our maths class. I really enjoyed that playing time and that may be the reason why I always topped the maths class. The funny thing is, when I moved to New Zealand and went to the casino for the first time and saw the games like blackjack and roulette played, I was really

happy because they were games I did enjoy and I knew it was something I would be good at and possibly win money [laughs].

Playing *pele pa'anga* 'card games with a monetary reward' was said to be a highly influential social activity for many Tongan families. Other cultural and familial activities were kava drinking and planting of crops for the family, church and village. Some Mātu'a described how immediate and extended families would come together, socialise and talanoa over card games such as talamu and suipi.

Manatu 'eku kei 'i Tonga, me'a eni ia 'i he valungofulu, ko 'eku tangata'eiki, ko e motu'a ko e pele pa'anga fau. Me'a eni 'i he pongipongi Tokonaki hono kotoa, kuo 'asi mai ki homau 'api 'eku fanga tamai mo 'eku fanga fa'ētangata. Talu mei ai ko e me'a pē ia'oku ou fai mo hoku fanga tokoua.

I still remember when I was in Tonga. During the 1980s, my father was really into playing card games for money. Almost every Saturday morning my uncles on both my dad's and mom's sides came to play cards for money with my dad. Since then, my brothers and I became hooked on the game.

Tokoua, na'e hangē pē 'a e pele pa'anga ha va'inga 'oku fai ai 'a e feohi mo e fakamokomoko mo e pō talanoa mo e kakai kehe. Ko e feitu'u na'e lata ki ai 'a e mātu'a koe'uhi na'e 'ikai pē toe 'i ai ha me'a ke fai ko e 'ā pē, kai, fakamaau 'api pea hangatonu ai pē ki he lalo 'akau na'e fa'a fai ai 'a e pele.

Brother, a card game was like a place where you could socialise and chill out of the sun and catch up with different people every day. It is a place where Tongan elderly men enjoyed socialising because there was nothing else to do. You wake up, eat, clean up the house and then retreat under the tree and carry on playing with the men.

Main Motives for Gambling

The majority of the Mātu'a said that the value of *feinga pa'anga* 'fundraising' was giving to, donating to or fundraising for a specific need or goal. As noted earlier, the value of fetokoni'aki is an integral part of Tongan society. Further, the likelihood is that what is given will be reciprocated with the same or higher value. The terms "fundraising" or "voluntary donations" were perceived to describe another form of gambling, particularly through activities such as raffle tickets and bingo. Money raised from the activity is then distributed, with a small proportion going towards prizes and the rest going to the church, the family or a community cause.

Kiate au, ko e gambling ko e ngaahi feinga pa'anga pe ko e feitu'u 'oku fai ai ae va'inga pa'anga.

To me personally, gambling is fundraising or any place where gambling is conducted.

Gambling activities can be viewed as people playing with their money. I guess with Tongans there are gambling activities that have specific goals and needs, for example, supporting families in Tonga, churches and all of that stuff.

While card games were a form of family and group socialisation in Tonga, over time other activities were also introduced, such as billiards and bingo (see Figure 3). As with card games, the added incentive of money raised the level of competition. In fact, some spoke about the rise of dedicated spaces where Tongan males would engage in billiards competitions, where the prize money would be T\$50 to T\$100.² Some Mātu'a also commented on how the prizes would often be more tangible rewards, such as boxes of meat, land or everyday necessities.

Ko e pele pa'anga 'oku fai lahi 'i Tonga. Kau ki ai pea mo e bingo pea mo e falehoka.

Card games for money are big in Tonga. Also big is bingo and pool tables where Tongans play for money.

For example, in Nuku'alofa, I saw the pool table where men will be competing for prizes and, as kids, we would come and watch people play pool or in the main shopping areas for smaller villages. It was there where I saw people looking at this kind of game as a way of raising money, but at the same time, people were losing more money because obviously, out of the competition, there would only be one winner.



Figure 3. One of many bingo venues in Nuku'alofa's CBD. Author's photograph, 2018.

DISCUSSION

Until recently there has been limited research on traditional games and contemporary gambling in Tonga and by Tongan people abroad (but see Fehoko 2020). However, Dale (2006) indicated that in early ethnographic writings it was reported that such activities were used for socialisation and building and establishing relationships with nearby villages and hierarchies. Dale (2006) also reported that sons of noble chiefs in ancient Tonga competed in traditional games, such as piliki and lafo, for tangible rewards such as poultry and land. Reflecting on their younger days in Tonga, several of the now New Zealand-based Mātu'a indicated that through engaging in these games they socialised with other young Tongans. These social activities varied, however, in terms of participation, motivations and rewards. For example, lafo requires certain equipment and is only played by sons of noble chiefs, whereas piliki is played by commoners. The motivations are different. With lafo, the motivation is driven by the elevation of social status, whereas piliki players seek the survival and betterment of the family and village. Similar aspects and experiences are also evident in the socialisation and competitive nature of *jekab* 'checkers' in the Marshall Islands (De Voogt, 2020).

The majority of the Mātu'a indicated that piliki was also a form of "survival". For example, several of the Mātu'a reflected on how they were told by their parents to collect a lot of coconuts in order to get something in return from a family member or someone in the village. These included *keke* 'isite' doughnuts', meat, taro and, at times, money. Although this is not "gambling" per se, the collecting of coconuts in any way possible was definitely risky, there was an intense sense of competition, and the Mātu'a referring to "survival" suggests this "game" had a serious side. It is human because of the drive to achieve something regardless of the situation and circumstances, and it is cultural as it is done to advance individual needs and family status.

There was a sense of an agreement among Mātu'a across the talanoa that, in contributing to family, church and community events, winnings from gambling elevated the status and rank of that individual, their family and their village within Tonga's traditional social structure. However, this elevated status and rank only depends on the contributions one makes to familial or cultural responsibilities. This finding fits with earlier Pacific gambling studies, where Pacific peoples were reported as resorting to gambling to try to meet and fulfil cultural demands and obligations (Guttenbeil-Po'uhila *et al.* 2004; Perese and Faleafa 2000; Urale *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, these cultural and financial responsibilities have seen young people leave the traditional churches in search of spiritual healing in other spaces (Schoone 2010).

The arrival of early missionaries and settlers in Tonga led to an introduction of games to Tongan society, including card games (Goodale 1987). While card gambling is commonplace across many ethnic minorities and indigenous communities (MacLean *et al.* 2019; Maltzahn *et al.* 2019; Zimmer 1987), this study highlights the transition from card games in settings such as home and community, without any added incentive or monetary aspect, to these games later being intensified with the introduction of money and a sense of monetary gain in the late 1960s. Tongan male elders have noted a clear transition from socialisation and fun games to individualistic gambling behaviours, especially when rewards are monetised. Further research is needed to explore the links between traditional game playing and monetised gambling activities across the Tongan diaspora.

For a majority of the Mātu‘a, their initial gambling experiences were in Tonga through card and other social games with immediate and wider family members in a social environment. Card games in Tonga are a fun activity where a sense of belonging and connection with the immediate and wider *kāinga* ‘extended family’ are fostered. In fact, card games have become both a socialising tool, bridging generational divides in family and society settings, and a method for learning and counting “on the spot”.

Apparently religious leaders increasingly overlook such activities, even if they do not contribute directly to church tithings. For example, Niumeitolu (2007) shared how money may be given for a prayer instead of valuables if the purpose reflects modern secular life; one young man in his early twenties, a member of the Free Church of Tonga, came with an envelope with some cash inside and asked Niumeitolu to pray for him and his studies. Niumeitolu posited that the focus is often more on the amount of money and less on how one worships God through his or her giving: the end can so easily justify the means. The traditional church practice, for example, is to call out loud from the front the donor’s name and how much they have given, thereby motivating people to contribute a lot. The church is seen to be more concerned about hierarchy, status, money, programmes, projects, buildings and reputations than the needs of the people (Niumeitolu 2007).

Niumeitolu (2007) also shared how ministers are often blamed for putting unnecessary *kavenga* ‘obligations’, financial or otherwise, on families in the name of the church. Sometimes members expressed this ironically, saying the minister would not visit when they were ill but only to collect money for the church. The people are in general more than willing to do anything that the church, as represented by the minister, requests of them. It is common for some if not most families to postpone paying rent, loans, monthly bills or children’s school fees just to save money for the demands or *kavenga* ‘*o e lotu*’ of the church’.

* * *

This article highlights the potential progression from traditional games (such as sika, lafo and piliki) to introduced Western games (such as card games, bingo and billiards) through to full-fledged gambling in modern-day Tongan communities, where it sometimes becomes problematic. Three themes have emerged. First, competitive, status-enhancing games have a deep history dating from the mythical past, and are amplified by Tonga's traditional monarchical, hierarchical and familial systems. Second, nearly all interviewed elders commented on the social and fun aspects of card games and bingo at home with family members during their childhood. However, they also reflected on the pervasive use of such games in the wider Tongan community as easy ways to win money. Similarly, whilst game-based fundraising contributes to families, churches and villages in Tonga and Auckland today, it was also viewed by the study participants as a form of gambling. Overall, the historical accounts of traditional games in combination with the childhood reflections of the interviewed Mātu'a suggests possible origins of contemporary problem gambling, which can have such detrimental impacts on families, churches and communities if left unchecked.

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NOTES

1. Sika was a game that involved two or more players. Ribbons were tied at the end of spears and the furthest throw would win. Traditionally, this game was carried out by sons of chiefs (Tongilava 1994).
2. T\$ is the symbol of the Tongan currency, the pa'anga.

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Edmond Fehoko, School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies, Te Wānanga o Waipapa/
The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.
Email: edmond.fehoko@auckland.ac.nz | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1809-5856>

