



ECCLESIASTES 8:1-17,  
KOHELETI (TONGAN), O LE  
TUSI A LE FAILAUGA  
(SAMOAN)

[Document subtitle]

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a first generation Tongan in diaspora (Fakahe) reading of 8:1-17. The purpose of the fakahe reading is to identify the strangers and aliens who wander into foreign place. It exposes the social and political context, identity, struggles, and its view on migrants. The main concern of this paper is with how one makes sense of new and strange places while preserving cultural values and traditions. This reading revisits place of origin to look at the social and political contexts and the reasons for migrating. It will also engage with the core of intergeneration issues. The limitations of the approach is that it can identify and give insight to the issues but it cannot resolve because intergenerational issues are more complex than -what we think. These matters will be taken into - consideration in the fakahe reading of Eccl 8:1-17

Taualofa Angaaelangi

*How does the fakahe*

## Introduction

This paper is a fakahē reading of the wisdom book of Ecclesiastes. The book of Ecclesiastes is part of the Hebrew wisdom literature, among other wisdom writings such as Job, Proverbs and Ben Sirach. Wisdom literature plays a significant role in the Hebrew writings because it derives from human experience, understanding, as well as questioning the meaning of life. The question often asked is how wisdom literature is relevant to us today, Penchansky writes: “They’re worthy of our attention because the questions that they ask are human questions, ones that emerge from the depths of peoples experience. Many wonder at the meaning of existence, the possibility for happiness, the inevitability of death.” (Penchansky, 2012, p. 9) The author of Ecclesiastes is identified as a sage name Qoheleth, he often refers to himself as a preacher, teacher, Speaker and Philosopher. Ecclesiastes 8 begins with the impulse to obey the King and it paints the picture of the type of society from where the author writes from. The passage talks about human experience, life, toil, the relationship of one to the King and the one they fear. The purpose of this paper is to apply a fakahē reading of Ecclesiastes 8:1-21 at the same time I weave in the three voices suggested by Penchansky on how to read Ecclesiastes: “Pessimistic Qoheleth, Fear of God, Enjoy life”(Penchansky, 2012, p. 15). In applying a fakahē method it seeks to read with the lens and reality from the experience of a first generation Tongan fakahē (migrant), and tries to understand and wrestle with some of the major themes of Ecclesiastes. Firstly, I will identify the context of the author and expose the reader to their political, social and historical environment. 2. An analysis of the literary Structure 3. Exploring the major themes of Ecclesiastes 8 and developing a fakahē interpretation of it. The ambiguity for some of the meanings of the themes allows us to contextualise it. 4. The fakahē method will seek the theological and significant interpretation of the exegesis paper and its relation to the rest of wisdom literature.

## Method: Fakahē

The word Fakahē is not a concept but rather it’s a reality it derives from the time when the Christian’s converts of the Methodist church of Tonga were persecuted, forced out of their own will to leave their homes and send into exile in Fiji. The exile in the Islands of Fiji is known to most Tongans as the time of the fakahē. For the Samoans the eruption of the Volcano in Savai’i led to the force migration of its villagers to board the Leauva’a this environmental disaster is what’s called force migration being force to leave because natural situations. Fakahē for us Tongans living in Australia the motivation to move was by choice to find better lives and opportunities. The differences with the Fakahē of these three groups. In the bible the most well-known story of fakahē is the exile of the Israelites. The differences with the Fakahē of this four groups is the motivation

One of the students to better top

behind their migration some were forced into migration and sent into exile and the others moved by choice. For some, the characteristics of what they come to experience is common. The second major difference between these three groups is the ones who were forced into exile have a longing for home compare to those who left by choice.

A Fakahē reading engages with the voice of first generation Tongan/Australian migrant. The purpose of the interpretation is to link the voices and the reality of the experiences from the first generation Tongan Fakahē migrant with the text; as well as allowing the reader to get a feel of the struggle, frustration and position of the stranger. The characteristics of a fakahē reading is consisted on; the following: System, experience, culture, struggle, influence, and understanding of their relationship with God. It exposes the system of the host country as well as contrasting it with the system of their own place of origin. In terms of the new environment the reading identifies who makes the decisions and holds the power, and who is dis-advantaged and privileged by this system. One of the most fundamental part in the life of migrants is experience, as part of the main elements in this method it looks at the different experiences in the journey. Every part of their experience in the new place begins to shape who they are in the new place. Culture plays a significant role for interpretations in diaspora because it challenges the reader to look at both the culture and traditions of the guest and host is intertwined or whether it becomes a monoculture. Using culture in this context also focuses on how the migrant holds on to their cultural beliefs as well as embracing the new culture. For example. In Tonga, there are five fundamental principle we believe is the centre of our culture Tonga which unites and to maintain their distinguish culture. These five principles quoted by Rev. Ahio: "The golden garland known as the afei koula 'o e fonua, 'ulunganga fakafonua 'o Tonga tefito faka'apa'apa, 'ofa, tauhi vaha'a, loto tō, mamahi'i me'a" (Smith, 2007) The golden garlands of a Tongan is a way of life used to maintain the culture and remind the Tongans in diaspora of what it means to be Tongan. Lastly, is how one understands their God in this foreign place? A majority of the Tongan migrant belong to certain denomination Methodist, Roman Catholics, Mormonism, Baha'I faith etc. How each one of these denominations worship God is not my interest but rather the way they understand God and the community of faith.

### The limitation of fakahē.

The limitation of a fakahē method is to read as a migrant can be assumed as an interpretation for the entire community of migrants in Australia. All migrants come from different countries it will be different from a Korean, Samoan, Fijian or others because of ethnicity, age, gender, experience, religion and etc. Every reader and interpretation must be able to shift lenses in terms of context and nationality. It's also limited because the reading of a Tongan who migrates to

New Zealand, America and other foreign countries will be totally different to me. This reading is an attempt by a young Fakahē, Tongan/Australian woman who is aware that her experience as a first generation does not comprise all of the whole Tongan community. Soulen writes : Although there is no one African American perspective, the operative assumption of AA biblical interpretation is that sociocultural space (esp race) matters; that it determines in large measure how and what one thinks, not only about scripture but also about oneself.”(Soulen, 2011, p. 1) The characteristics of the fakahē reading are vital elements for some of us first generation Tongans but it might not be viewed in the same way as the second and third generation Tongans /Australians. Furthermore on the weaknesses of this reading is not all people who migrate experience struggle, oppression, marginalisation and some of the features I mentioned. Lastly is the assumption that when you move overseas it becomes complicated, we can only be stranger when entering foreign places this is not always the case. In fact the characteristics of struggle, being out of place, oppression and complications occurs and experience in our own countries of origin. Therefore, we are lost and confused in our own country of origin and it's already confusing on its own.

### Analysis of Context.

The book of Ecclesiastes has been agreed to have been written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. Qoheleth begins chapter 8 by painting a portrait of the context he is writing from. Scholars have observed that the author Qoheleth lived in the time where: “Judah had become a part of the Greek Kingdom if Egypt ruled...by General Ptolemy...a period of peace and prosperity for the rich in Judah, and the author of Ecclesiastes apparently belonged to the ruling or upper class, enjoying wealth and ease.”(Kee, 1997, p. 251) He focuses on three major aspects of his society. 1. We are introduced to the wise man, their role and the importance of their wisdom. 2. The ruling of his context is under the power of a King whose commands are intermingled with the God they worship. 3 Qoheleth signifies the injustices he sees in his environment where the wicked people are receiving what the righteous people deserve.

Verse 1 Begins with a question on the wise man and introduces us to what wisdom does and ends the verse by affirming its role wisdom. Qoheleth assembles his reflection on the King and his ruling. Verse 2,3,4,5 points out the King's command was sworn by individuals to be followed alongside an oath to God it seems that the allegiance pledged by the citizens in this society is paid to the King. One's loyalty and respect to the God they worship is in the same way they're reminded to view the King. The ruler of this society is one that cannot be questioned or disobeyed because their commands is powerful and if it's followed accordingly and verse 5 points out its consequence it will protect its citizens.



The wise man is often referred to as sage's their role is being highlighted as a significant attribute as well as their wisdom in this context. Crenshaw writes: "The sages of Israel lived in a time of much less scientific knowledge of the universe and its operations and depended more heavily on traditional understandings and ways of acting... they worked from a broader concept of wisdom." (Boadt, 2000) The wise man contributed their wisdom to the world of Qoheleth because they're mentioned more than ones in the book of Ecclesiastes. He lives in a monarch where he is under the ruling of a King who were often identified as divine creatures "Kings in ancient societies were considered to be especially endowed with divine wisdom to rule." (Boadt, 2000) The society that these Kings rule is full of injustice, corruption as well as oppression towards its citizens. Qoheleth is not in favour of the system that functions in this place, verse 14: "There are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous." As he indicates the injustices caused by the system it makes us wonder about his own experience why it mattered to him.

### Analysis of Literary Structure

The beginning of Ecclesiastes 8 introduces us to the wise man it emphasises on the role and importance of the wise. As it continues to verse 2 "Keep the king's command because of your sacred oath" and verse 5 "Whoever obeys a command will meet no harm, and the wise mind will know the time and way" it seems out of place because it moves to write about the King and his commands which have been sworn with an oath to God. The discussion of the wise man coming right on top of the dialogue of the King influences the reader to think that their wise man is the King if the reader is not careful they may consider that the wise man and the king are the one character.

### Analysis of Major Themes:

There are several themes in the book of Ecclesiastes my focus will be on the following terms: wisdom, Vanity and Fear of the Lord.

#### *Wisdom*

Wisdom is a major theme in the book of Ecclesiastes it's described as a concept of understanding an order of "Hokmah. This system is associated with the Sages or the wise man's ability to seek the mental and physical understanding of an order in the world. Kugel observes:

"Wisdom was first and foremost a way of life and of understanding the world... Among its fundamental tenets is the belief that the world makes sense, that underlying all the apparent confusion and injustice and disorder of daily existence is a basic pattern, an ordering by which all such phenomena can ultimately be understood."

This expression of wisdom in the context of Ecclesiastes is where the author applies his life story and paves the pathway to Hokmah. This understanding of wisdom applies to stories that comes out of a first generation fakahē Tongans experience. Inverse 6 it says “For every matter has its time and way, although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them” Qoheleth expresses all that he has experienced is has a time and a way this is part of the system wisdom that Hokmah draws “learning the truth of wisdom is a life long task.” (Kugel, 1988, p. 402) Qoheleth’s troubles are not ignored in the passage, instead he addresses the issues of time and place. Therefore wisdom is not only a mental capacity it’s both physical and mental. The wisdom from the days of Ecclesiastes is very much related to those of the Fakahē.

Meaningless, Vanity- Muna-Hebel-breath-vapor and Mapuhoi, -faatauva  
(Samoan)

Vanity or hebel is translated into the word vanity which is a common word used throughout the whole book of Ecclesiastes in fact it is mentioned thirty eight times. The word Hebel comes from “the sound a breath makes,” (Penchansky, 2012). In the Tongan bible we use the word “muna as in insignificant which is a direct translation for vanity. In translating Hebel to vanity has limited readers to find other meanings or translations for Hebel. Most scholars argue that Qoheleth sees the negative meaning of Hebel as a tool for readers to use as a way of interpreting the book. Penchansky writes: “Pessimistic Qoheleth uses hebel as his repeating chorus... This repeated phrase functions as a motto or thesis statement to summarize how Pessimistic Qoheleth wants the book to be read.” (Penchansky, 2012, p. 51) I’m suggesting we use the origin of where the word Hebel came from which is a sound of breath or vapour, because of its ambiguous meaning and its dependence on its different context. “In Ecclesiastes we cannot nail down a definitive meaning or translation for hebel... it means different things in different places.” (Penchansky, 2012, p. 52) In my Tongan native language hebel or the sound of a breath is something like a mapuhoi, mapuhoi can be read in two different ways. A mapuhoi is someone taking in a deep breath after hard of work and just before they sit down to rest they mapuhoi. The other meaning of mapuhoi can be a spiritual meaning breathing life into something that needs reviving. This reverse in the meaning of the word enables us to approach and hear word the Hebel in a more positive manner rather than its depressing ending.

Fear of The Lord – ‘Apasia kihe ‘Eiki -

Fear of the Lord “Apasia kihe ‘Otua”: The fear of the Lord in the concept of Fakahē is an obligation to be in a reciprocal relationship with God. Many scholars have suggested that Qoheleth’s understanding of God is one that is far away from the people in his day. In light of the fakahē characteristic of

“lotohounga’i: an overwhelming feeling of appreciation” indicates a migrant appreciates their relationship with a God who has never left them in their time of struggles in the new place. To fear the Lord or ‘apasia kihe ‘Eiki starts with the appreciation as well as their obligation to keep this close relationship. ‘Apsasia is described in the following terms: “to be respectful or reverent. The word denotes the inward feeling or mental attitude.” (Churchward, 1959, p. 550). Therefore, Fear of the Lord for the first generation Tongan when translated into the Tongan bible does not come out as a concept of being afraid but rather relational. A first generation Tongan migrant’s view of their God is not a feeling of fear, but they hold onto their relationship because it shapes and transforms their faith and identity in this foreign place.

### Analysis of Theological/Interpretive Significance:

Qoheleth starts chapter 8 with a rhetorical question about the wise man and what wisdom does do the worries that affects the face of a person. When the first generation Tongan dialogues with the younger generation. He asks them about the wise man and with our interpretation of wisdom he is talking about himself he is the wise and it is the experience of wisdom that brighten his face: “Wisdom makes one’s face shine, and the hardness of one’s countenance is changed.” The advice to obey and keep the Kings command is part of him reminding the younger generation of the Tongan motto “‘Otua mo Tonga ko hota Tofi’a” in other words God and Tonga are my inheritance. In the context of the host country it could mean not to quickly violate the unjust system of the new country but to obey, learn it and challenge it at the right time and way. This is the way of wisdom Verse 6 “For every matter has its time and way, although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them. As the wise man continues to observe in verse 9 “applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the others hurt.” As the wise man continues to tell his story about the injustice system of his current context he is realising that the wicked are receiving what the righteous deserve. For the Tongan fakahē it’s not just the political system that is viewed as the wicked ones. But there are individuals who make their life difficult because there are stories about the struggle of illegal immigrants who are reported to the immigration office to be deported back to Tonga. For the fakahē Tongan this group of people will be classified as the wicked of all. In the eyes of those who are dobbed they call themselves as the upholders of the law. In all this the wicked ones and the righteous ones may disagree about who is in the right position. The wise man says in verse 12 “Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him” This fear is not the feeling of being afraid but the “the appreciation as well as their obligation to keep this close relationship” the Tongan interpretation of fear of the Lord is ‘apasia kihe ‘Otua to be respectful or reverent. The word denotes the inward feeling or mental

*advice - grief in fact*

attitude.”(Churchward, 1959, p. 550)The wise man reminds his audience it was going to be well with him because he has always kept his close relationship to the Lord. He concludes his story and stating that all of this is Hebel or mapuhoi reversing the term from vanity and meaningless changes the way we read the end of Ecclesiastes 8. In all of the struggles of unjust systems, applying one’s mind to understand wisdom is not all meaningless but rather a mapuhoi life giving reality from the first generation Tongan.

### Conclusion

The book of Ecclesiastes has been a contradictive, complexed and depressing book. This has been the results of interpretations that doesn’t focus on how some of the main themes can be shifted and bring creative interpretations to the book which still gives respect to its author and origin. The fakahē reading is anto read certain books that are focused on human experiences and to find it place in those biblical text. It is in need of a second and third generation so that the first generation reading so that they’re interconnected and together they maychallenge the presuppose issues of intergeneration’s.



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