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Critical Reflection on Practicalities of Pacific Research Methods and Methodologies

CONNECTIONS AND SEPARATIONS: REFLECTIONS ON USING PACIFIC RESEARCH METHODS WITH PACIFIC YOUTH IN AUCKLAND

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ABSTRACT: While Pacific research methods are now widely used, there are emerging arguments around the "correct" application of these methods given the contemporary research settings in which they are often applied and the different philosophical, cultural and social elements that influence their application in practice, especially in Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific youth contexts. This paper argues that reified contemporary forms of Pacific research methods may not necessarily align with traditional Indigenous practices and protocol, but the values underpinning these methods remain central to engaging and doing effective research with increasingly multifaceted and, at times, culturally ambivalent Pacific communities in Auckland. This article explores the experiences of an early-career Pacific researcher doing research with young Pacific men in Auckland, Aotearoa, with a particular focus on negotiating tensions of connection and separation when using Pacific research methods in contemporary diaspora settings. The diverse range of cultural knowledges and understandings among Pacific youth in Auckland emphasise the wider acculturative patterns emerging within Aotearoa's Pacific communities, thereby underlining the need to discuss how we can adapt Pacific research methods so that they are inclusive of these diverse cultural knowledges and enable research methods that empower, rather than alienate, the increasing number of second-, third- and fourth-generation Aotearoa-born Pacific people in Aotearoa. This paper affirms the legitimacy of Indigenous Pacific knowledge and research methods as a platform for revisioning what culturally appropriate research can look like and developing Pacific research practices that acknowledge the lived realities of the communities taking part. This is an important step towards sustaining Pacific research in which contemporary Pacific communities, particularly youth, can recognise themselves and their aspirations for the future.

Keywords: talanoa, Pacific studies, Pacific, Indigenous, diaspora, method, methodology, Aotearoa

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While Pacific research methods are now widely used in Pacific research, important and necessary critique is emerging from Pacific academics in relation to how these Indigenous methods are being applied in practice. These critiques are based on claims that Pacific methods such as talanoa

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(from the Tongan word talanoa, meaning sharing of ideas or conversations based on histories, realities and aspirations) are being applied in a manner that does not align with the Indigenous protocols or practices underpinning these methods. This paper engages this critique, focusing on the use of Pacific methods in research with Pacific young people in Aotearoa New Zealand and highlighting why Pacific methods can be effective for doing research with Pacific communities residing in settings that feature a plethora of both Pacific and western social and cultural influences. As Pacific researchers, we know that we often apply elements and principles of Pacific research methods in pieces, unevenly or inconsistently. This paper argues that although contemporary applications of Pacific research methods may not necessarily align with the original Indigenous practices and protocol that inspired these methods, the underlying values on which they are built remain essential to engaging and doing research with Pacific people. However, when using these methods, it is important that we reflect on how we frame these contemporary applications and make sure that we articulate the points of difference between how we apply them in academic research and how they are applied within Indigenous contexts and settings. This article builds upon critical discourse from scholars such as Fa'avae *et al.* (2016) who have called on Pacific researchers to place greater emphasis on voicing the complexities and challenges we face when implementing Indigenous philosophies and practices within our research practice.

My Introduction to Talanoa as a Research Method

In this paper, I will draw upon my experiences doing research with the increasingly diverse and, at times, culturally hesitant Pacific youth population living in Auckland, Aotearoa. In particular, I focus on how I have negotiated the tensions of connection and of separation between the researcher and research participants (the knowledge holders) when using Pacific research methods, namely talanoa, with Pacific youth in an Auckland diaspora context. Like many Pacific postgraduate researchers, my worldview and learnings within the classroom led me to adopt Vaioleti's (2006) talanoa method for the qualitative phase of my PhD research project. This paper does not aim to describe, explain or critique talanoa as a research method (for explorations of this, see Vaioleti 2006 and Fa'avae *et al.* 2016). Rather, it offers critical insights and reflections on my experiences of using the talanoa method to do research with Pacific youth in Auckland. Talanoa as a research method provided me with an effective and concise Pacific cultural reference point for undertaking qualitative data collection that is aligned with the social norms and practices many Pacific researchers are raised with but sometimes take for granted as universal among our Pacific communities here in Auckland.

Pacific research methods such as talanoa have rightfully been front and centre during my postgraduate studies, and we graduate students have been taught that they are central to carrying out effective Pacific research. As such, I was confident that talanoa would be an effective and culturally appropriate method to use in my research. These assumptions, for the most part, were correct, and I was able to frame and justify my open and informal approach to data collection using this important and groundbreaking method.

The Dilemma…

As important as Pacific research methods are when researching with Pacific communities, there is an assumption that all Pacific peoples can engage comfortably and confidently with Pacific cultural principles, processes and practices. Drawing from my six years of experience using Pacific research methods with Pacific youth in Auckland, I have found that many of the Pacific youth I have done research with feel alienated rather than empowered when engaging in more traditional Pacific spaces and participating in certain practices that are seen as essential to carrying out effective talanoa and Pacific research. While I acknowledge that this will not be the case for all Pacific youth, the increasing number of multiethnic Pacific youth and diverse range of cultural knowledges and understandings within this group is representative of the wider acculturative patterns emerging in Aotearoa's Pacific communities, who are mostly born and raised in Aotearoa and unable to speak their Indigenous language(s).[1]

Pacific communities have proudly carried and sustained their cultures while migrating to and living in Aotearoa.[2] However, due to migration and acculturation, the reality, as shown by recent research, is that knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, languages and practices are trending downwards fast within our Pacific communities (Manuela and Anae 2017). This paper is not centred on questions of cultural identity or debating whether these acculturative trends are positive or negative; rather, it acknowledges the reality facing our communities and aims to build upon the discourse of what these changing trends mean for carrying out effective and culturally appropriate research in contemporary Pacific spaces that may differ significantly from the spaces Indigenous Pacific research methods were developed and intended to be used in.

Ultimately, we must be proactive in adapting and developing Pacific research methods so that they are inclusive of these developing cultural knowledges, so that we can facilitate research that empowers, rather than alienates, Pacific youth in Aotearoa and perhaps other diasporic hubs, such as Australia, where Indigenous Pacific cultural knowledge is less prominent. This paper affirms the legitimacy of Indigenous Pacific research methods

as a platform for revisioning culturally responsive research that is inclusive of the diverse realities and cultural reproduction that is present and always evolving within Pacific communities in Aotearoa. I argue that this is an important step towards sustainable and engaging Pacific research in which Pacific diasporic communities, particularly youth, can recognise themselves and their aspirations for the future. Ultimately, this paper aims to reflect on the following key questions: (i) How can we as Pacific researchers implement Pacific research methods when researching with Pacific people who have limited knowledge of and experience with Indigenous Pacific protocol and practices? and (ii) How can we carry out culturally responsive Pacific research that empowers Pacific youth in their multifaceted contexts?

Papa'anga and Positionality

Before I answer these questions and reflect on my research experiences, it is important to position myself in this conversation. The researcher reflecting on their positionality is an important part of Pacific research in order to identify how their worldview and lived realities might affect the research process. Reflecting on positionality also helps to ensure that research findings consider the phenomenon of situated knowledges, which refers to the idea that all forms of knowledge reflect the particular context in which they are produced and, whether intentional or not, the positionality of the researcher (Rose 1997). In my research, reflecting on my positionality has helped me to identify gaps in my academic, social and cultural knowledge. Ultimately, reflecting on positionality is about acknowledging that who we are as individuals and researchers influences research design, methodology, data collection and the way data is analysed, interpreted and represented.

From a Cook Islands perspective, reflecting on positionality and the process of establishing oneself is founded upon the genealogical practice of akapapa'anga (the reciting of one's ancestral lineage) and is central to identity-making and connecting people to ancestors and land (Powell 2021). I am a Cook Islands Māori and Papa'a (person of European descent) man, born and raised in Auckland, with ancestral links to many of our islands in the Cook Islands but most notably Rarotonga (Ngāti Uirangi) and Palmerston (Marsters). Given my positionality as a 29-year-old Cook Islander living in Aotearoa, I have experienced firsthand how quickly cultural knowledge and practices can change and be displaced, with the latest statistics highlighting that only 9 percent of Cook Islanders in Aotearoa can speak te reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani (Cook Islands Māori), which declines even further to 3 percent for Cook Islanders who were born in Aotearoa (Ministry for Pacific Peoples 2020). Like many Pacific people, I grew up in a large and loving family. I went to school in West Auckland and then attended the University of Auckland where I gained entrance to the Māori and Pacific Certificate in

Health Sciences programme and eventually attained a Master of Public Health, after which I worked at Auckland Hospital before returning to the University of Auckland to complete my doctoral studies with Te Wānanga o Waipapa (School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies), exploring the mental health experiences of young Pacific athletes in Aotearoa. Away from studies and work, I married a beautiful tamaʻitaʻi Sāmoa (young Samoan woman), and we were blessed with the birth of our beautiful son, Joseph-Teariki, in 2020. After completing my doctoral studies in 2021, I was able to undertake postdoctoral research thanks to the Health Research Council of New Zealand's Pacific Health Research Postdoctoral Fellowship, which funded my project exploring the importance of informal mental health help-seeking for Pacific men in Aotearoa. In 2022, I was blessed to take up the role of lecturer in Pacific Studies at Te Wānanga o Waipapa at the University of Auckland. My papaʻanga (genealogy; ancestry), upbringing and lived experiences inform the way I view the world and, ultimately, underpin my approach to research and my motivation to ensure Cook Islanders and all Pacific people, particularly young Pacific people, can see themselves, their lived realities and their aspirations for the future reflected in the ways we discuss and undertake research within our communities.

THEORISING DIFFERENCE AND SAMENESS, CONNECTIONS AND SEPARATIONS

Why the Terms Insider and Outsider Did Not Work for Me

Historically, it has been argued that researchers occupy an insider, outsider or insider/outsider position in relation to their research and research communities. An insider researcher refers to an investigator who has a direct connection with research participants and the research context, and is usually defined through shared experience, whereas an outsider researcher is someone who does not share any commonalities with participants (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). While many still use the insider/outsider framing, Ryan (2015) challenges the usefulness of these terms, explaining that researchers and participants hold multiple interrelated positionalities that cannot be slotted into such fixed categories. Ryan (2015) also states that making such black-and-white assumptions of shared experience undermines the fact that people frequently hold multiple identities and perform different identities in different contexts and research settings.

Like many Pacific researchers doing research within their own communities, I was unable to assume a fixed position as an insider or outsider or even an insider/outsider. Rather, I simultaneously shared a sense of sameness with participants through our shared intersecting identities, as well as a sense of difference given the many differing and sometimes contrasting identities we held. Each interaction in my experiences as a researcher

has differed depending on the position and identity that participants have assumed, most often governed by factors such as gender, age, class, religion, ethnicity, educational background, acculturative status, language or athletic status. Mohammad's (2001) exploration of the power dynamics present in research by using the concepts of difference and sameness was more useful than the insider/outsider framework when trying to make sense of my experience as a Pacific researcher. Sameness is the process in which the researcher and participants share and connect over some sort of common identity or shared experience. Difference is essentially the absence of sameness within the research relationship.

Cultivating a Sense of Sameness Throughout the Research Process and During Talanoa

In this research, I was able to draw upon my age, where I lived, where I grew up, my lived experiences growing up in Auckland, schooling experiences, mutual friends, ethnicity and church, among others, to develop and nurture the relational space between me and the participants, build rapport and construct a feeling of comfort and sameness with them. I would ask questions about where the young men were from, what schools they went to, where they lived, what sports teams they played for and if they knew so-and-so from here and there. When engaging with the community and carrying out talanoa and data collection activities, I have had to reflect on what aspects of my identities as a person and researcher may strengthen or diminish the development of strong and authentic relationships built on respect, love, empathy, understanding and rapport to cultivate meaningful connections and open talanoa; in most cases, it has been shared cultural identities that has strengthened engagement and talanoa with adults and elders, while shared social identities have proven more valuable when developing bonds and undertaking engagement and talanoa with youth. In addition, I have had to negotiate the power dynamics that characterise my position as a university-trained and -employed researcher and the community's position as participants, dynamics that can cause tension and a sense of unease for some participants who would otherwise feel comfortable engaging in talanoa outside of a formal research setting.

Pacific Youth as Edgewalkers and Carrying Out Talanoa That "Walks Between" Cultures

Pacific youth often express multiple and sometimes contradictory identities and narratives of self, dependent on the social, cultural and/or political setting in which they live, a process that Tupuola (2004) termed "edgewalking" to illustrate the numerous sociocultural and political settings that most Pacific

youth "walk between" daily (Mila 2013). Tupuola states that as researchers we must move beyond viewing Pacific youth in Aotearoa within fixed parameters and work towards implementing research processes that are able to "walk between" cultures, adapt methods to settings that are far removed from their genealogy and avoid narrow and essentialised representations of an increasingly diverse and multifaceted population group. Given this context, it was important to me that my research methods were flexible enough to capture the fluidity and diversity of Pacific youth identities that exist within Auckland. Most importantly, I wanted to ensure the Pacific youth who took part in my research were able to articulate their multifaceted selves without feeling any pressure to live up to any particular social or cultural expectations.

Reflections on the Term "Culturally Responsive"

Growing up in Auckland and doing previous research with Pacific secondary school students in that city, I was aware of the hesitancy and anxieties that some Pacific youth face when engaging with more "traditional" Pacific processes and spaces, which are often seen as activities for elders and not youth (Marsters 2021). I have found that the willingness of young people to share their stories openly with me has depended not so much on my cultural processes and knowledge but on my social mannerisms, processes and ability to develop a sense of sameness with them. Reflecting on these experiences, I am reminded that culturally responsive research is not so much about the Indigenous cultural frameworks and processes we use but more so about the way we apply the social, relational and cultural values of our respective Indigenous cultures. In the case of my research experiences, meaningful engagement and open talanoa have taken place when my research processes have been responsive to the multifaceted social positions and cultural identities held by participants and the communities taking part.

Talanoa regarding mental health stigma and masculinity, for example, was not necessarily open and engaging because of the cultural processes used; rather it is through Pacific relational principles and the building of a sense of sameness through the sharing of our lived experiences of navigating the hypermasculinity and emotional stoicism that are unfortunately the norm among young Pacific men growing up in Auckland. What was most important to cultivating open talanoa, however, was how we talked about our experiences: the slang, the food, the vibe, the jokes to hide the truths, the laughs to hide the cries, the mannerisms, the subtle acknowledgements of vague insinuations, and the unspoken talanoa that was always happening alongside the spoken talanoa.

The Researcher as an Edgewalker

A balance between both difference and sameness is seen as ideal, as a degree of difference allows for diverse perspectives to be shared and helps to cultivate open-minded and impartial interactions while sameness cultivates a sense of connection and enables authentic communication and knowledge sharing (Mohammad 2001), which is essential to carrying out Pacific research. Similar relational principles related to the idea of sameness and difference were applied when carrying out talanoa with older Pacific stakeholders; however, these interactions had a different power dynamic given my positionality as teina (younger sibling) and the elevated age and status of key stakeholders who held the position of tuākana (older siblings or elders). Smith (1999) affirms the complexity for Indigenous researchers of occupying the same, but different, space, explaining that Indigenous researchers are "inside and outside of their own communities, inside and outside the academy, and between all those different worlds", touching on the privilege as well as the responsibilities we hold as Indigenous researchers and the complexities associated with being part of two very different and conflicting worlds (Smith 1999: 14). As a result, and in line with my cultural values and upbringing, stakeholders, most of whom were Pacific, acted as tuākana and would initiate most of the talanoa to build the vā (space, betweenness that connects), which often followed the same processes carried out with youth but in reverse. These processes were also a lot more aligned with the cultural practices and relational processes we abide by within more traditional Pacific settings.

NAVIGATING CULTURAL HESITANCY AND DISCONNECT

A big part of my journey as a researcher, and the main motivation behind this paper, has been reflecting on the persistent feelings of cultural hesitancy and inadequacy that were prominent among many of the young Pacific people that I have spoken to and done research with within Auckland. While these young people were very proud of their Pacific heritage and well attuned to their cultural values, they would often explain the anxiety and discomfort they feel when engaging in more traditional Pacific cultural spaces. During talanoa, young people would say things like "that's just overboard" or "that's too much" when we discussed different cultural processes and approaches to research and why young Pacific people in Auckland are not keen to engage with traditional Pacific health services and research. As an example, some of these young people said that they automatically switch off or disengage when they hear people speaking in their Pacific languages. One young Samoan man captured this phenomenon well, explaining how he and his younger family members always felt excluded when attending family and church events as they did not understand the language nor the

cultural customs and protocols that were taking place. This is not a new phenomenon for young Pacific people in Aotearoa, with multiple generations of Pacific youth having faced challenges to developing their Pacific cultural knowledge and identity; however, these experiences did present practical dilemmas for framing and applying talanoa in a way that aligned with these contemporary youth perspectives but still centred our Pacific cultural values and the method's decolonising effects.

How I Applied Talanoa in a Way That Embraced the Cultural Hesitancy Expressed by Youth

Many of the comments around cultural hesitancy resonated with my own upbringing and lived experiences as a young Pacific person growing up in Auckland, staunchly proud of my culture but similarly detached from the language and unsure of the meaning behind certain traditional protocols and practices. Because I had this lived experience, I was able to apply talanoa and the overall research processes in ways that were underpinned by Pacific values and principles of relationality, while also understanding that the use of overt Indigenous customs, processes and practices could alienate many of the young people who made up the communities I was doing research with. I achieved this by ensuring that the spaces and places in which talanoa took place were chosen by participants, with most young men preferring to talanoa at their local club or favourite food spot. As Fa'avae *et al*. (2016) stated, these chosen sites and the rejection of more formal talanoa protocols, such as prayer, contradicted many of the key principles of cultural competency that we read about in the literature and are taught in postgraduate classrooms. After all, these young men were mostly born and raised in Auckland, and their lived realities, day-to-day customs and social protocols were reflective of that. At the end of the day, our job as Pacific researchers is to meet the communities' needs rather than the other way around. Epeli Hau'ofa (Ellis and Hau'ofa 2001) reminds us that we must be wary of the trapping of tradition in times past, signalling that culture is fluid and always mixing, evolving and adapting. Hau'ofa states:

> We've often put our traditions in cages, and so we try to do what we think our elders, the people in the past, did. And we trap our traditions there. We freeze them. Whereas people in the past really lived very much like people in the present. There were always cultures mixing. Things were fluid, they were not frozen. But we froze them. (Ellis and Hau'ofa 2001: 23)

Ultimately, when navigating the cultural hesitancy that may exist among some Pacific people, we must be fluid in our approach and embrace these complexities to make visible the diversity of Pacific Indigenous experiences. Also, as Mika (2017) and Matapo and Enari (2021) state, we must use the

term "Indigenous" with caution, as the practice of labelling anything with a colonial term and static definition is problematic and contradicts our real Indigenous cultures and practices. Lastly, while western and Pacific research approaches are often dichotomised, there are contexts and research settings that may benefit from the combination of western and Pacific methods based in Pacific relational values and epistemologies, as was the case with my PhD research.

How Talanoa Helped to Address Tensions Between Decolonising Practices and Relationality

There were also some other noncultural tensions and complexities that I had to navigate in my attempts to adopt an Indigenous Pacific epistemology, the main one being the fact that religion, for many Pacific young people in Aotearoa, is now the central medium through which cultural traditions and knowledge are transferred (Thomsen 2019). In fact, for many of these young men, cultural identities and beliefs were seen as secondary to their religious identities and beliefs (Marsters and Tiatia-Seath 2019). With the declining language proficiency rates and the increasing number of Pacific families who have been living in Aotearoa for multiple generations, it is easy to see how the central meeting place for Pacific communities, the church, has become one of the prominent sites in which our cultural practices and traditions are being maintained (Ministry for Pacific Peoples 2020). Again, as a Pacific researcher I was aware of this dynamic in Auckland and how culture and religion are intertwined for many of our Pacific people. Despite my personal views and experiences, I felt conflicted between my position as a Pacific researcher who was well-versed in and committed to decolonising methodologies and research spaces and the reality in our community that Christianity and the church are among the most important elements of our postcolonial cultures for many in our communities. Vaioleti (2013/2014) touches on similar themes, highlighting that decolonising academic research was a key motivator behind the development of talanoa as a research method and methodology. Vaioleti states that Pacific methodologies must be based on thinking, languages and cultures that originate in the Pacific region; yet Christianity and the church in themselves are products of colonisation and did not originate in the Pacific, even as they hold utmost influence within our cultures and communities today.

Reflecting on this experience, questions arose around the strong push in academia towards decolonisation theory and the seemingly contradictory push towards religion that is happening within our communities. How can we challenge colonisation in our research when colonial systems and beliefs, such as Christianity, are so important to our people? While this paper does not aim to answer these questions or address whether this context is positive

or negative, I again experienced tensions in framing my research given that my worldview and training as a researcher did not align with my lived realities and those of our communities and the practices important to our people outside of academia. Leaning on the thoughts of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), this experience emphasised that we must be careful when taking an Indigenous and/or decolonial approach to research, as the separation between Indigenous and western worldviews is not always clear. As in the case of my research experiences, using Indigenous research methods often requires adopting new ways of applying Indigenous processes and philosophies dependent on the relational, social and cultural identities present within the contemporary research settings we inhabit. Again, this aligns with the reality that Indigenous cultural practices and processes are neither static nor closed (Matapo and Enari 2021).

Nevertheless, the Pacific young people that took part in my research engaged well with the way I framed and undertook talanoa. While the application of talanoa in this context did not centre specific cultural traditions and practices, our shared understandings of growing up as Pacific people in Auckland and our many shared social identities helped us to connect, evidence of the significant diverse Pacific youth subculture that has developed in Auckland since our parents, grandparents and, for some, great-grandparents migrated here. While the contexts of Pacific youth cultures are ever-changing in Auckland, I argue, without disrespecting the sacredness of our Indigenous cultures, that this subculture is no less of a cultural conduit than are historical Indigenous cultures for many Pacific people living in Auckland. We are still extremely proud of our ancestral homelands and respective genealogies, but the limited connections and knowledge of our cultures, derived from the fact that we were born and raised in Auckland, means that we find other ways to connect with the diverse realities around us.

Dilemmas with Framing and Naming My Research Methods and Avoiding the Need to Clutter

Although I faced challenges attempting to label and describe my research approach and practice, it was clear to me that the values shaping these were very much the same as those shaping Pacific research methods such as talanoa. In my PhD dissertation I labelled the interviews and focus groups I did as "talanoa-style", but after further reading and reflection I can see that I comfortably agree with Sanga and Reynolds (2017) in their assertion that we must not clutter the literature and knowledge base on Pacific research methods by feeling the need to rename and reframe all the different ways we do Pacific research. Rather, we should understand that our Indigenous research methods, processes and practices are not static and continue to voice the different complexities and responses we face applying Pacific research

methods within our various communities. Sanga and Reynolds (2017) state that Pacific researchers should be confident in their fields of research and should use whatever is at hand to achieve Pacific research interests: as long as these processes align with Pacific thought and practice then they are Pacific research. The same attention, care and emphasis we place on protecting the cultures of our past should be applied when thinking about how we protect the cultures of our present and future, a process that, when done respectfully, offers opportunities to honour origins and protect legacy (Sanga and Reynolds 2017). If we are to really value Pacific agency and empowerment, we must protect the Pacific values and qualities within our research methods, but also understand that over time, cultures and identities will continue to be negotiated, reproduced and contested in a journey that will require clarity and constant reflexivity from us as Pacific researchers if we are to stay on top of what is and is not Pacific research (Sanga and Reynolds 2017).

Just like other areas of our culture, our Pacific research methods are flexible and dynamic. We should not feel imperfect because we apply our Pacific research methods in contemporary ways that do not explicitly align with the way these methods are presented within the literature. Navigating the disconnect between our research practice and the Pacific frameworks that we reference should not centre around how we make our practice fit with specific methods but should focus more on how we embrace the diverse and ever-changing contexts in which our communities find themselves without losing the Pacific foundational values and practices that make our research, and people, Pacific. It is about doing research in a way that resists the colonial view that Indigenous cultures and practices are static and only exist in the past while moving towards embracing the new ways that our cultures are practised today. In the next section, I will discuss the practical steps I took in my research to adapt a Pacific Indigenous research approach to the multifaceted contemporary realities experienced by young Pacific people here in Auckland.

MERGING PACIFIC INDIGENOUS AND CONTEMPORARY REALITIES

It was initially very challenging for me to describe the way I applied talanoa in my own research. I was stuck on trying to answer questions such as: When is talanoa no longer talanoa? At what point is research no longer Pacific? And how do I ensure my research is founded upon Pacific values without invalidating the cultural and social identities that the young Pacific people, and even some of the elders, I was researching with carried? Reflecting on my training as a Pacific researcher and the lectures I attended over my university studies, it was clear that my research did not align with the way we were taught. But I was also aware that my research did not align with

western methodologies and frameworks either. Some aspects were very clearly Pacific and other aspects were culturally ambivalent.

Ultimately, it was important for me to validate the subcultures that exist here in Auckland for our Pacific people, especially those who were born and raised in Auckland, many of whom are part of the second, third or fourth generation of their family to grow up here. In this way, I think that while Indigenous cultural practices and processes were not strictly adhered to during my research engagements, the engagements that took place were still very much culturally appropriate and responsive to the processes and protocols that young Pacific people and increasingly Pacific adults are most comfortable with here in Auckland. The main tension for me was not wanting to disrespect the sacredness of our Indigenous cultures and practices as well as the groundbreaking work of earlier Pacific scholars who faced significant backlash from academia in their efforts to establish and centre Pacific ways of knowing and being within academic research. Pacific research methods like talanoa are also very rich and nuanced cultural practices, so I did not want to appear as if I had watered down the method and overlooked the important principles on which it rests.

My first response to this tension was to simply label my data collection methods as semistructured interviews and focus groups underpinned by Pacific relational values. A potential issue with this approach, however, is that it may be seen to detract from the years of work undertaken by the Pacific scholars who came before us and pushed hard to develop and validate our Pacific research methodologies within academic spaces. As Fa'avae *et al.* (2016) state, we cannot fall back on dominant western research methods just because we might face challenges practising and implementing our own Pacific research methods. This approach would have also oversimplified the research design and detracted from the richness of the engagements that took place and the nuanced processes that characterised these engagements. For example, there were many traditional Pacific protocols embedded within the contemporary approach I took during the interview process, such as the use of prayer to open and close at the request of some participants, the offering of food and gifts to show appreciation and respect for participants' time, knowledge and wisdom, and the open, informal and circular style in my approach to dialogue and addressing the research questions during interviews which led to many off-topic discussions, which in many ways does align with traditional forms of talanoa.

Reflecting on these experiences now, it is clear to me that further discussion is required to collectively theorise what the future of Pacific research methods might look like. Do we continue to develop and build new research methods and frameworks? Or do we build upon existing ones and

focus on how they can be applied in different contexts? As Pacific researchers, we must also do this theorising without drifting too far from the Indigenous values and principles that make our research Pacific in the first place. Within my research, the focus was on how I could capture the multiple social and cultural identities that our young people perform here in Auckland while embracing and empowering these identities within my research rather than attempt to use a one-size-fits-all approach. I was able to achieve this by making slight adaptations to the methods being used in response to the people I was engaging with. This was only possible because I had long-standing relationships with people that were involved in my research and a deep knowledge of the spaces and places of the research context. Co-construction of methods/methodologies with communities we are researching with is a key step towards better aligning our research practices with the needs of our communities. Cammock *et al.* (2021), for example, used talanoa alongside youth participatory research methods to ensure an empowering and inclusive youth voice was present within their research. Meo-Sewabu (2014) also proposes a process of cultural discernment that can be used to design research approaches in consultation with the community to ensure a valid cultural fit. This process provides navigation and support when the relationship between research context and research theory may not align. Regardless of titles and labels, what really matters is ensuring that we do research that celebrates, develops and supports the lives of Pacific people as both unique and connected, wherever they are. Contexts will always differ, and thus, so will processes and practices. Acknowledging this reality respects the values of our ancestors while acknowledging the fluidity and dynamism of the world in which we live.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant need for further discussion to collectively develop a culturally responsive methodology that is sensitive to the diverse and multifaceted contemporary Pacific diaspora communities living in Aotearoa. Many of the Pacific research methods used in my research have been adapted to fit the contemporary Pacific youth context in Auckland through a globalised urban Pacific diasporic aesthetic. While effective, there is a need to voice the tensions we face as Pacific researchers and theorise contemporary forms of Indigenous protocols and knowledge that build upon existing Indigenous Pacific processes to develop research methods that are more relevant to the lived realities and everyday lives of Pacific people in diaspora spaces like Aotearoa. In my experiences using talanoa and other Pacific research methods, I have faced many tensions and contradictions attempting to apply these methods in a way that aligns with the traditional Indigenous principles and protocols that inspired them. Building upon Fa'avae *et al.*'s

(2016) paper encouraging us to better voice the practicalities and challenges faced using talanoa and other Pacific research methods, I reflected on my experiences and found that existing Pacific methods were not necessarily adapted to the multifaceted and diverse realities facing Pacific diasporic communities like Pacific youth communities in Auckland, and yet they do provide an invaluable Indigenous Pacific platform upon which we can build our contemporary Pacific research practices and processes. While these contemporary processes may not be explicitly cultural, they centre on the development of authentic and sustained social connections, which is where our Pacific cultural frameworks thrive. Although we usually apply Pacific methods in ways that are vastly different to the Indigenous practices upon which they were developed, the same Indigenous values and sacredness remain. We must not shy away from this phenomenon: instead we should draw from the strengths of our Indigenous research methods and embrace the diverse ways they play out in different research settings, with the focus on ensuring our research principles and processes are truly responsive and empower, rather than alienate, the multifacetedness that exists in the communities we do research with in Aotearoa. At the same time, we must be intentional in describing where our research practices deviate, and do not deviate, from their theoretical constructs. As Sanga and Reynolds (2017) state, respect for the past must be the platform on which the innovation and creativity for the future sit.

In the same way we frame and explain Indigenous cultural practices and processes in our research, we must also work to be transparent in the way we explain the social identities and contextual realities shaping the research we do with Pacific communities in more contemporary settings such as Auckland, Aotearoa. We must work to continue developing this space, building upon the work of existing Pacific research methods so that our Pacific understandings of reality, knowledge generation and values, in all their diversity, can eventually stand on their own as the bases of a research paradigm that serves Pacific contexts and interests here in Aotearoa. We must confront and contest the colonial view that Indigenous practices and processes are static. Ultimately, we must pay our respects to the scholars who have set the foundation for Pacific research despite the restrictions that made their work a struggle, while also having the confidence to pick and choose elements from existing frameworks to best serve Pacific interests and prepare a useful space for future generations. To avoid oversaturating the Pacific research methods space, we must not feel the need to rename the research methods we use; rather, we should do careful work distinguishing where our methods fit within the literature, orient the research methods and methodologies that we base our research on, and clearly voice the points of difference that exist in the way we apply these methods in practice.

Critical reflection and critique will help to facilitate a respectful conversation that presents us with the opportunities to honour origins while also safeguarding Pacific qualities in the future and ensuring sustainable development of Pacific research methods. As with many aspects of our Pacific cultures, the new can be done in old ways and the old can be practised in new ways—both underlined by the values that have sustained generations of Pacific people. This reality reflects the complexity and multifacetedness of past, present and future Pacific peoples, illustrating the broad spectrum of tradition and Indigeneity that remains within our growing urban diasporic Pacific communities. More researcher reflexivity and discussion is essential for the development and sustainability of Pacific research founded upon Pacific ways of knowing and being. My hope is that these discussions will ultimately cultivate research in which Pacific communities in Aotearoa can recognise themselves and their aspirations for the future.

NOTES

1. As an example, the 2018 New Zealand census found that only 16 percent of Pacific youth can speak their respective Indigenous language(s) (Ministry for Pacific Peoples 2020).
2. For an in-depth history of Pacific people's experiences in Aotearoa, please see Mallon *et al.* (2012).

GLOSSARY

The terms included in this glossary are Cook Islands Māori unless otherwise stated.

akapapa‘anga	genealogical practice of reciting ancestral lineage
Papa‘a	person of European descent
papa‘anga	genealogy; ancestry
talanoa	sharing of ideas or conversations based on histories, realities and aspirations (Fijian, Samoan, Tongan)
tama‘ita‘i Sāmoa	young Samoan woman (Samoan)
te reo Māori Kūki ‘Āirani	Cook Islands Māori
teina	younger sibling
tuākana	older siblings; elders
vā	space, betweenness that connects (Samoan, Tongan)

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