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## Vā and Veitapui as Decolonial Potential: Ongoing Talatalanoa and Re-imagining Doctoral Being and Becoming

David Taufui Mikato Fa‘avae

TE KURA TOI TANGATA, UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

**Abstract:** Ko e taumu ‘a ‘o e tohi ni ke tau talatalanoa fekau‘aki moe vā moe veitapui. This chapter is centered on vā and veitapui, Tongan concepts grounded in Indigenous Pacific philosophies linked to relational spaces. I articulate how the decolonial potentialities of doctoral being and becoming require intimate navigation and negotiation, highlighting the fluid, rich, and nuanced knowledges within vā and veitapui. Doctoral writing, as understood within vā and veitapui, provided a critical space for me to legitimize and value Indigenous Pacific thought in relation to dominant western knowledge. By employing Tongan concepts, I share how, through doctoral learning and writing, the encounters and experiences strengthened and affirmed my fatongia— an obligation and responsibility to honour and safeguard our cultural knowledges. For me, engaging in my own doctoral writing project was a matter of socio-political struggle and epistemic disobedience, because the academic traditions linked to perceived “proper” writing conventions were not what I adhered to in my own doctoral writing (McDowall & Ramos, 2017). In this chapter, I share how the concepts of vā and veitapui aided me in uncovering time-spaces within doctoral learning and education, and I re-imagine how Tongan ideas, language, and practices could be re-presented through writing.

Ko e koloa ‘a e Tonga ‘oku hā sino ia ‘i he fakafōtunga ‘o ‘etau lea, fakakaukau, mo ‘etau to‘onga mo‘ui pe ko hotau ‘ulungaanga. For many Indigenous Pacific peoples,<sup>1</sup> our ancestral knowledges are at the heart of who we are and

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1 I use the term “Indigenous Pacific peoples” to refer to Indigenous people of Moananui-a-kiwa and their ancestral knowledges and languages.

how we interpret and make sense of our worlds. It was not until my older sister and I started high school during the early 1990s in South Auckland, New Zealand, that we felt at odds with who we knew ourselves to be based on our home experiences and how we were perceived to be at school. What made it even more challenging for us was the fact that our own father's expectations of us were similar to those of our teachers. To my father, Tongan knowledge and practices had no place at school. His expectation was for us to acquire and excel in the English language. Western academic skills were of precedence. Tongan cultural knowledge and practice at the time, at least for my father, belonged at home. It was not until I started my postgraduate studies that I realized the significance of my ancestral knowledge to my success as an educator and researcher within higher education.

'E malava nai ke fakamamafa'i 'a e lea Tonga mo e ngaahi fakakaukau 'a e Tonga 'i he mala'e 'ekatemika? Ko e tali ki ai – 'io. Indigenous Canadian scholar Margaret Kovach (2015) claims "incorporating an Indigenous worldview into a non-Indigenous language, with all that implies, is complex . . . [and] is a troublesome task of crisscrossing cultural epistemologies" (p. 53), requiring more work than is often recognized by mainstream academics. In this chapter, to challenge the prevailing tendency to privilege western knowledge and language, I foreground *lea faka-Tonga*<sup>2</sup> alongside concepts in doctoral education discourse. Within this text, I use *lea faka-Tonga* to intercept the dominant tendency to frame understanding and composition by predominantly relying on English concepts and language for meaning. Like Tongan scholars Linitā Manu'atu (2000) and Timote Vaioleti (2016), I employ *talatalanoa*<sup>3</sup> here to invite Tongan and Indigenous students and scholars to engage in this space of ongoing discussion about the ways in which we can appropriately draw from our ancestral knowledges and collaborate with each other to make sense of and honor our knowledge and language within academia. At the same time, this discourse will allow a wider audience to consider and appreciate what it means to live and work-with<sup>4</sup> knowledge systems that are outside of their own. Hence, a fundamental question I address in this chapter is, "How can Indigenous students participate in doctoral education discourse yet draw from their ancestral knowledge systems and

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2 Throughout this chapter, I use footnotes to provide translations and definitions. Here, *lea faka-Tonga* means the Tongan language.

3 Ongoing and continuous purposeful discussions

4 I use the term "work-with" to refer to intimate encounters that involve negotiating, honouring, and safeguarding Indigenous knowledge in research and actively seeking to learn from people and their cultural knowledge.

re-present their framings through western modes of text like the thesis document?”<sup>5</sup> This chapter is part of an ongoing conversation and moves between languages—*lea faka-Tonga* and English—highlighting *vā* and *veitapui*, the fluid relational space where the re-imagining of doctoral writing can be used to empower and transform Indigenous Pacific doctoral students’ thinking and practice. I have opted to use *lea faka-Tonga* in the form of questions or key points in most paragraphs to involve Tongan readers in the re-thinking and re-imagining of indigenous ideas in doctoral writing.

The narrow imaginings of doctoral subjectivity in the past has led to researchers paying increasingly close attention to doctoral education as a field of power relations shaped by gender, emotion, relationships, and care (see Burford & Hook, 2019; Grant, 2008; Hook, 2016; Manathunga, 2007). This chapter is an attempt to re-imagine the possibilities of doctoral writing that are often ignored by the academy itself. Moana<sup>6</sup> academics have diverse views about the purpose of doctoral research. Many assume doctoral writing should mimic dominant western ideals and processes, epistemologies and ontologies. During my undergraduate study in the late 1990s within the discipline of psychology, the norm at university (reiterated via conversations with my lecturers) was that researchers are distanced from what they are writing about. However, almost fifteen years later, during my doctoral study, the use of “I–my–we–us–our” in doctoral academic writing was encouraged and viewed as a significant practice of how “students [could] find their voice” (McDowall & Ramos, 2017, p. 56; see also Thurlow, Chapter 5, this collection) and how I could contribute new knowledge to the academy.

## Vā moe Veitapui: An Indigenous Worlded Philosophy of Relational and Inter-relational Spaces

‘Oku mahu‘inga ‘a e ngaahi tefito‘i lea ko e vā moe veitapui ‘i he talatalanoa moe fakakaukau ‘a e Tonga ‘i he mala‘e ‘ekatemika. Tongan scholars ‘Okusitino Mahina (2005) and Tēvita Ka‘ili (2017) developed the *tā-vā* theory within the field of social anthropology and Indigenous discourses to underscore spatio-temporal underpinnings and the fundamental view that time and space intricately co-exist and do not operate in isolation. This

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5 Indigenous not only refers to those in the moana, but also refers to other minority students from other parts of the world who have been implicated by the colonial legacies of the west.

6 An individual whose positioning relates to Moana-nui-a-kiwa (Pacific ocean, or Oceania) and has heritage links to the ocean (moana) or Oceania (Moana)

means that, in order to make sense of space, time must also be acknowledged when considering context. Churchward (2015) defined *vā* as the “distance between, distance apart” (p. 528). Figuratively, *vā* relates to the relational space or inter-relation(s) between people as well as between people and perceived inanimate objects, such as the land, ocean, or sky. As articulated by Carl Mika (2017), Indigenous philosophies take on a *worlded* stance, where entities such as the land, ocean, and sky shape the process of how one comes to know oneself and, as such, are intimate parts of one’s world and consequent world views. Through an Indigenous worlded philosophy, *vā* can also be used to understand the space in-between, in which people relate to and make sense of their ideas and concepts. Such inter-relations are believed to be spiritual and sacred in nature, as well as epistemological, because all things in the world are relational and intricately connected (Martin et al., 2020; Wilson, 2001).

According to Mika (2017), this interconnection is critical to the relationship between Indigenous selfhood, knowledge, and the metaphysics of presence, with the idea of the metaphysics of presence referring to a tendency to want to seize a “stable truth,” which frequently involves “grasping something objectively and holding it in place” (p. xi). This view contrasts with Indigenous worlded philosophies, whereby truth and the state of being are both “unknowable force[s]” comprising both “form and formlessness” and both “visible and invisible dimensions” (Mika, 2017, p. xii). In other words, the concept of truth is “elusive, equivocal and context-dependent (time, space), encompassing both multiplicity and uncertainty” (Mika, 2017, p. xii). When it comes to conceptualizing doctoral writing, I find Mika’s speculative stance useful because it provides pathways forward for understanding the ways in which doctoral selves are fluid rather than fixed and very much dependent on multiple contexts in their formation. Two inter-related components of these contexts are *tā* and *vā*—time and space. My own experiences with becoming an Indigenous researcher have been (and continue to be) shaped by my experiences in New Zealand as a former secondary school teacher and experience in the wider Moana as a research fellow at the University of the South Pacific’s Institute of Education. Thus, when I position myself as a “Tongan-born-in-Niue-raised-in-New-Zealand-with-Samoan-heritage,” I do so in its entirety, meaning that all layers contribute to my sense of being and becoming.

*Veitapui* is a derivative of *vā*, and both are linked to spiritual and sacred relational spaces that are carefully cared for and nurtured, such as one’s relationship with god or a spiritual being. When employing *vā* and *veitapui* to better make sense of relational spaces within doctoral education, they are

applied using the principles of ‘ofa<sup>7</sup> and faka‘apa‘apa<sup>8</sup>. For instance, vā and veitapui can be used to understand the doctoral supervision space in relation to the relationship between students and supervisors, students and the mentoring space, and Pacific students’ relational connections with other Indigenous groups within a shared space of learning and interaction. Learning how to navigate and mediate the relational connections within vā and veitapui leads to the honouring of knowledges and peoples. During monthly writing workshops for students supervised by my primary doctoral supervisor, I was able to learn academic writing skills as well as research knowledge from other more experienced doctoral students who had almost completed their projects. To honour the learning, I shared similar insights with other doctoral students in the department. Through vā and veitapui, these relationships enabled healing and the re-conciliation of the “self” in relation to Tongan culture, identity, and my fatongia<sup>9</sup> to ensure the continuity and survival of Tongan cultural knowledge (Thaman, 1995). Indigenous scholars of Samoan and Tongan heritages have been the most prominent in theorising, framing, and applying vā through their writing (see Amituanai-Tolosa, 2006; Iosefo, 2016; Ka‘ili, 2017; Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). Samoan scholar, Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni (2017) articulated vā as a social organising principle in the Samoan aiga<sup>10</sup> and society, explaining that as a core idea associated with relational space, vā “governs all inter-personal, inter-group, and sacred/secular relations and is intimately connected to a Pasifika sense of self or identity” (p. 163).

Both vā and veitapui provide decolonial potentialities within doctoral education. By centering on Indigenous concepts like vā and veitapui as tools for theorisation, we may enable Indigenous students’ capacity to develop confidence, know how to respond back to dominant western discourses, and deconstruct colonial thinking and practices that are embedded in research practices. This chapter offers an understanding of doctoral writing through vā and veitapui. It provides reflections of my doctoral journey in terms of the situations (encounters within the spaces) and inter-relations that challenged my thoughts and research actions and the subtleties and complexities when using an Indigenous and less formal method, for example, the talanoa method, in relation to more formal western semi-structured interviews in my doctoral study (see Fa‘avae et al., 2016).

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7 Love

8 Respect

9 Obligations and responsibilities within the collective

10 Family

## Tree of Opportunities Metaphor and the Hyphen (-): Re-imagining Doctoral Writing through Vā and Veitapui

The “tree of opportunities” metaphor was developed in 2001 by Pacific educators and leaders in response to a desire to sustain Indigenous Pacific knowledges while embracing the global contexts of learning and education that were pervading the region at the time (Pene et al., 2002). The tree of opportunities symbolizes the coming-together of Indigenous Pacific leaders as well as the taking of ownership over providing opportunities to re-think education in response to ongoing changes related to modernity. In other words, the metaphor of the tree of opportunities provides a place for hyphenated work. I use the hyphen strategically here to indicate my desire to enable critical talatalanoa. The hyphen (-) provides a technical and symbolic vehicle for the idea of vā and veitapui by allowing connections to be established between fluid and nuanced ideas and processes that are inter-related.

However, the hyphen has its limitations. Samoan theologian scholar Faafetai Aiaivā (2017) articulated concerns with whether the hyphen could appropriately capture the lived realities of Pacific people in the diaspora. In his view, many scholars describe the hyphen as an in-between space that is linked to isolation rather than connection, particularly because Pacific people are diasporic, and he notes there is a tendency for New Zealand-born-and-raised Samoans to feel dis-connected with their heritage roots and language in Samoa and thus to turn to the hyphen to symbolise their uneasiness and isolation. Mindful of misappropriation, in this chapter I use the hyphen to symbolise the ideas of vā and veitapui and to emphasise an ongoing negotiation that does not require one to “arrive at a [particular] destination” (Aiaivā, 2017 p. 139). Specifically, I use the hyphen to enable a continuous yet critical talatalanoa. The “critical” within talatalanoa allows for an intimate interrogation of the similarities as well as the differences in-between, not favoring one or the other, but placing an emphasis on the entirety.

## Moana-Pacific-Pasifika: Context of My Doctoral Study

‘Oku fe‘unga mo taau ‘a e hingoa “Pasifika” ke faka‘ilonga‘i‘aki ‘a e Tonga ‘i Aotearoa (New Zealand)? ‘I he ngaahi talanoa mo e fatu tohi ‘a Toketā Linitā Manu‘atu mo e ni‘ihi ‘o e kakai Tonga ‘i he mala‘e ‘o e ako ,na‘a nau fokotu‘u ‘a e tefito‘i kaveinga ko e “Fakakoloa ‘a ‘Aotearoa ‘aki e lea Tonga, loto‘i Tonga, mo e nofo ‘a kāinga (Manu‘atu, et al., 2016) ke fakahā mai ‘a e kehe ‘a e Tonga mei he ni‘ihi ‘o e Pasifika ‘i Aotearoa. The term Pasifika was coined by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Samu, 1998) as a

way to group the diverse ethnic groups in New Zealand who have heritage roots to Moana-nui-a-kiwa.<sup>11</sup> Outside of New Zealand however, the term Pacific is commonly used to represent the array of peoples and cultures from the Moana<sup>12</sup>. I use Pacific and Pasifika interchangeably in this chapter based on the contexts I reference, either within New Zealand or outside of New Zealand in the Moana—as it relates to the specific cultural knowledges and communities involved.

To help me capture the perceived currency of Pacific (and Pasifika) ancestral knowledges in schooling, during my doctoral studies I was advised to turn to the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Although Bourdieu did provide some critical insight via his theory of cultural capital, which refers to how some knowledges have more value than others, particularly in formal learning contexts, I found that much of his thinking and writing linked to cultural capital was framed primarily using western, Eurocentric concepts. For instance, Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of cultural reproduction and social reproduction provided an explanation for why palangi<sup>13</sup> students performed academically better at school, theorizing that their home knowledges were reproduced as formal qualifications. Yet, this assumed a view that schooling reinforced and privileged western forms of knowledge and learning, thereby marginalizing other knowledges. While Bourdieu's work gave me a point of reference, I found it contributed to deficit views of my Tongan ancestral knowledge in schooling. I chose to value Tongan cultural knowledge and emphasise the strengths in the intergenerational stories shared by the grandfathers and fathers with their sons and the ways in which such stories and experiences were operationalized by them in western schooling context (see Fa'avae, 2016, 2019). Consequently, with encouragement from my European primary supervisor—an advocate for Indigenous knowledges—and Tongan secondary supervisor, tatala 'a e koloa 'a e to'utangata Tonga<sup>14</sup> was developed as an approach to capture the process of unfolding intergenerational knowledge across generations of Tongan kāinga<sup>15</sup> in Aotearoa<sup>16</sup> and Tonga and as a way to ensure their cultural survival and continuity (Shipman, 1971; Thaman, 1995).

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11 The Pacific Ocean

12 Oceania

13 A White person, often having European heritage

14 Conceptual framework linked to material wealth as well as knowledge and wisdom (shared valued cultural knowledges) within Tongan kāinga

15 Extended families

16 New Zealand

## Navigating Doctoral Education Discourse and Honouring Indigenous Knowledge Within Research

My doctoral study was centered on honouring Moana-Pacific-Pasifika and Indigenous knowledges, and in this chapter, I reflect on what it means to navigate the doctoral education space using Indigenous lenses, experiences, and frameworks like *koloa 'a e to'utangata Tonga*. 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki (2015), the former Minister of Education in Tonga, articulated *koloa 'a e Tonga* as follows:

Ko e 'uhinga ki he ngaahi tefito'i tui mo e fakakaukau 'a e Tonga, 'o kau ai 'ene ngaahi 'ilo mo e pōto'i ngāue, hono hisitōlia mo hono tukufakaholo, anga fakafonua mo. . . 'ene lea fakafonua . . . he ko e ngaahi tefito'i tui mo e ngaahi fakakaukau 'a e Tonga, 'oku taumu'a kātoa pē ki he tauhi 'a e ngaahi vā kotoape pē ke lelei, pea *koloa'ia* ai mo kaukau mālohi, ma'uma'uluta, melino, feongoongoi, pea mo fe'uhi'aki 'a e nofo 'a kāinga. [*Koloa 'o e Tonga* refers to the core values and the ways of thinking of a Tongan, including knowledge and skills, its history and its inheritances, traditions and . . . its language . . . because a Tongan's values, beliefs and ways of thinking, all aims to maintain all relationships concerned to achieve prosperity and attain strength, harmony, peace, mutual understanding and interdependence within the extended family.] (p. 4)

Navigating how to write appropriately for the academy yet honor the re-presentation of Indigenous ideas and meanings requires ongoing negotiation within *vā* and *veitapui*. Doctoral education, as an international practice and field, is a “rapidly transforming, and increasingly uneasy area” (Burford, 2016, p. 97). However, limited attention is paid to what doctoral education *feels* like for doctoral students (Burford, 2016). In this chapter, I share my doctoral education learnings, experiences, and emotions. Through doctoral writing, I immersed myself in the ongoing training that Ailie McDowall & Fabiane Ramos (2017) referred to as the “tradition of formulaic [and] evidence-based writing” (p. 55) within the western academy; however, at the heart of the framing and re-framing of intergenerational cultural capital were Tongan ideas like *koloa 'a e to'utangata Tonga*.

'Oku mahu'inga 'aupito ke faka'apa'apa'i pea tokangaekina mavahe e tangata'i fonua 'o 'Aotearoa, pe ko e kāinga Māori 'i ha fekumi kotoa pē e fakahoko 'i he mala'e 'ekatemika fekauaki moe fonua ni. To relate to, main-



tain, and honour connections with Māori, the tangata whenua<sup>17</sup> in Aotearoa and in the wider moana, developing my position as a self-identified Indigenous researcher in my doctoral writing was *koloa*<sup>18</sup>. I apply the terms “indigeneity” and “Indigenous” in this chapter in relation to my position as Tongan/Pacific/Pasifika with the critical intention to safeguard and honor ancestral knowledges. As such, my desire is to achieve self-determination by re-thinking and re-imagining doctoral research through Indigenous Pacific worldviews. Indigeneity or Indigenous are representative of my being and becoming an Indigenous researcher and academic (Martin et al., 2020) in multiple contexts across the diaspora of New Zealand and Tonga. Although Tonga was never officially colonized (Taufe‘ulungaki, 2014), remnants of western systems and practices, symptomatic of its past relationships with Great Britain and New Zealand, are prevalent in Tonga’s institutional and educational systems.

Decoloniality, or decolonisation, is a fundamental aim for Pacific or Pasifika doctoral researchers working-with Pacific methodologies and methods in higher education (see Fa‘avae, 2018; Iosefo, 2016). The role of Indigenous Moanan scholars involves disrupting the boundaries within higher education in order to focus on, realise, and re-imagine the significant embodied and emotive spaces that are aligned to our sense of belonging (Pene et al., 2002). Like Ka‘ili (2017), I too use the term Moana as a decolonising attempt to re-claim the naming of Polynesia or the Pacific in this chapter. The place of “re” in this chapter is central to the Indigenous Moanan research goal, that is, to seek self-determination and re-conciliation for researchers and their communities (Smith, 1999) by honouring and foregrounding Moana voices and experiences, relational connections, and the sharing of knowledge and practice that enables cultural continuity.

Shawn Wilson (2001), Indigenous scholar and writer of the Cree people from Canada, argued that Indigenous researchers “need to move beyond [just providing] an Indigenous perspective [on western research paradigms] to researching from an Indigenous paradigm” (p. 175). Working-with a particular Indigenous paradigm requires us to thoroughly explore the Indigenous ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology that encompass “a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions as to how you’re going to go about doing your research” (Wilson, 2001, p. 175). I fronted a Tongan paradigm in my doctoral research as a deliberate shift from just providing an Indigenous view of why Tongan knowledge and language is de-legitimized in western schooling (see Manu‘atu, 2000; Manu‘atu et al., 2010).

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17 Original people of the land

18 Valued knowledge

Navigating the doctoral writing journey can be perceived as a tool or vehicle for advanced learning within higher education. Doctoral writing is a critical relational space where the inter-connections of ideas and praxis are ongoing and where negotiation is a decolonial potential. When I started my doctoral journey in February 2014, my first experience of the doctoral writing space was at a workshop organized by the University of Auckland's graduate office. The first year doctoral students who attended were split into groups of three and encouraged to share our intended doctoral projects with each other. The members of my group were excited to share their ideas and desire to use western qualitative and quantitative approaches that have had years of robust application across research disciplines. I was genuinely interested and excited for them. When it was my turn to share my research intentions, however, my proposition to engage in a Tongan research methodology did not elicit a similar response from them.

Koe hā nai ha kaunga 'a e koloa 'a e to'utangata Tonga ki he fekumi moe fakatotolo he mala'e ako? Tatala 'a e koloa 'a e to'utangata Tonga was an outcome of my doctoral project. It is a cultural framework underpinned by intergenerational stories in Tongan *kaingā's*<sup>19</sup> sense of being and becoming in an everchanging world. In my doctoral study, to'utangata Tonga as valued knowledge was manifested in three forms: koloa<sup>20</sup>, koloa'ia<sup>21</sup>, and fakakoloa.<sup>22</sup>

## Koloa'ia As Healing: Realising the Value of "I–My–We–Us–Our"

Koloa'ia is a state of realisation, knowing that what you have is of real worth and value. My father's eldest brother passed away two years ago. His words of wisdom and care continue to resonate in me and my cousins and echoes a reminder of our *fatongia*<sup>23</sup> to our to'utangata.<sup>24</sup>

Ko ho'o mou fatongia ke tā ha sipinga lelei ma'ae to'utupu.

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19 Extended family

20 The valued knowledges and practices transmitted from generation to generation within the extended family

21 An internalized state within which one realises and acknowledges the significance of the knowledge transmitted

22 The act of purposefully continuing the transmission and sharing of knowledge to the next generation for the collective's continuity

23 Sense of obligation to the collective within Tongan extended families

24 Generations of Tongan people

. . . Tokoni‘i nautolu ke ‘oua tenau hē. [Your obligation is to role model good ways and practices for your brothers and sisters and their children. . . Support them so they are not lost.]

We often take for granted what we have until we have either lost it or are close to losing it. The goal to acquire western academic knowledge in high school, advocated by my father, led to mixed feelings in me about the place of our Tongan ancestral knowledge in schooling contexts. However, my realisation over its place in university came when I embarked on my doctoral study. Working-with the intergenerational stories of families in New Zealand and Tonga meant I had an obligation to give back to them, even beyond the project’s end. Within the doctoral education space, it provided ways to re-imagine writing, particularly when using Tongan concepts and ideas. In doing so, I found my voice and felt empowered to speak back to western discourses and institutional systems that disadvantaged Pacific peoples.

Doctoral writing shaped my doctoral being and becoming, and it provided healing. The learning processes associated with writing promulgated emancipatory feelings and attitudes that affirmed a place to stand from, seeking self-determination. Not only that, but learning to write and weave together Tongan concepts and methodology with non-Indigenous ideas was to engage in what McDowall & Ramos (2017) termed *epistemic disobedience* in higher education. Using Tongan approaches in my doctoral thesis enabled me to re-connect with Tongan “embodied and emotive” expressions and practices (Hook, 2016, p. 2). Being embedded within this process of writing in the Tongan language and using Tongan ideas such as *koloa*, *koloa‘ia*, and *fakakoloa* ignited intimate, spiritual, and sacred feelings often alluded to by Tongans as the emotional state of *mālie*<sup>25</sup> and *māfana*<sup>26</sup> (Manu‘atu, 2000).

‘Oku mahu‘inga makehe ai hono ngaue‘aki ‘o e “au–hota–hotau–kitaua–kitautolu” ‘i ha fokotu‘utu‘u mo fatu talanoa ‘i ha fekumi pe fakatotolo? The use of the first person “I-my” when writing is a liberating experience. McDowall & Ramos (2017) claimed that the use of first person in doctoral writing is important so readers can “recognize it was not a robot that had done the research, but a living breathing person” who made an “original contribution to knowledge” (p. 56). Many Indigenous researchers from collectivist groupings who utilize Indigenous paradigms believe that all knowledge is relational (Mika, 2017; Wilson, 2001). To them, the role of “I-my-we-us-our” in doctoral

25 The energising and uplifting of spirits to a positive state of connectedness and enlightenment

26 Inwardly warm feelings

writing is vital to positioning their responsibilities as researchers in universities *and* as members of Indigenous communities. Doctoral writing has the potential to heal the researcher by mediating the inter-relations between being and becoming an Indigenous researcher in relation to his/her positionality within his/her Indigenous community and in the university community. Similarly, doctoral writing has the potential to honor and privilege Indigenous knowledge and culture, especially for metropolitan Moana academics in New Zealand, Australia, and the US who may not always identify with the heritage languages and cultures of their Moana parents and grandparents.

‘Oku ‘i ai ‘a e ngaahi faka‘uhinga loloto ‘i he lea faka-Tonga pea ‘oku hā ia ‘i he fo‘i lea ko e to‘utangata Tonga. McDowall & Ramos (2017) argued that the “language we use to write is not value free” (p. 59). My Tongan values and ideals were inherent in the language and style I used in my doctoral thesis as well as in publications thereafter. The act of re-presenting, re-capturing, and re-telling intergenerational stories through publications and presentations were conditional on my respecting and honoring the *vā* and *veitapui* with the *kāinga* involved in the doctoral project. During a writing retreat at the St. Francis Retreat Centre in Royal Oak, New Zealand, I joined a group of master’s and doctoral Moana students from the University of Auckland Faculty of Education. When asked by the co-ordinator as to what sessions I wanted to organise for the students, I opted to offer my insights and share knowledge about what it might mean for students to use an Indigenous research methodology and Indigenous theoretical concepts or ideas in their studies. This engagement with my peers was my enactment of *fakakoloa* and extending the *vā* and *veitapui* with my Moana sisters and brothers—a pedagogical engagement I value, one that fulfills my sense of service as an Indigenous researcher seeking to navigate and privilege Indigenous knowledge in higher education.

## Fakakoloa and Active Leadership: For-By-With-Pacific People

‘Oku mahu‘inga ‘a e fakakoloa he ko e taha ia ha ‘ulungānga ‘oku fotu mei ha tokotaha ‘oku taki lelei. To *fakakoloa* requires active leadership. To *fakakoloa* is to share and impart stories that will empower and transform Indigenous peoples’ lives. As a key principle within the tree of opportunities metaphor, *fakakoloa* is to enable active leadership. Moana leadership is driven *for-Pacific*, *by-Pacific*, and *with-Pacific*. Despite the growing number of Moana-Pacific-Pasifika students in higher education institutions, there is still a shortage of Moana-Pacific-Pasifika academics (McAllister et al., 2019). Both

Tara McAllister et al. (2019) and Sereana Naepi (2019) have argued that universities need to make “dramatic structural changes if they are to meet their own and national commitments to Māori and Pasifika communities” (Naepi, 2019, p. 231). Moana-Pacific-Pasifika academics and researchers should lead research spaces that involve their communities (Naepi, 2019), a commitment and responsibility that should be honored, respected, and cared-for within the vā (Iosefo, 2016).

Moana leadership is a critical component in sustaining Indigenous peoples’ aspirations. The idea of “*for-Pacific*, *by-Pacific*, and *with-Pacific*” people is central to the drive for self-determination (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017; Taufe‘ulungaki, 2014). After 30 years of dis-satisfaction with Pacific education reforms and “significant investments by national governments and donor agencies” (Pene et al., 2002, p. 1) in the moana<sup>27</sup>, a group of 19 Moanan scholars gathered together in Suva, Fiji, to “share, debate, and reflect what they believe[d] to be the main issues and challenges in Pacific education” (Pene et al., 2002, p. 1). The tree of opportunity metaphor was developed by the leaders as appropriate for re-thinking Pacific education, highlighting the central purpose of Pacific education in the region, which is to ensure the “survival, transformation, and sustainability of Pacific peoples and societies, with its outcomes measured in terms of performance and appropriate behavior in the multiple context[s] in which they have to live” (Pene et al., 2002, p. 3). For Indigenous communities, foregrounding and writing using Indigenous ideas, language, and knowledge is significant in any research project that involves them.

‘Oku mahu‘inga ‘aupito ke tau fili ha kakai totonu ‘a ia ‘oku nau taukei ‘i he mala‘e ‘oku fakahoko ai ho‘o fekumi mo ho‘o fakatotolo. Central to navigating the doctoral education spaces is having the right combination in your supervision team. Having a Tongan supervisor, Linitā Manu‘atu, paired with a non-Indigenous academic, Alison Jones, was critical in my learning to re-connect, re-concile, and navigate doctoral learning and academic writing as a Tongan researcher. Over time, nurturing the vā relationship between my supervisors and me enabled me to see how Tongan language and culture could be capitalized in higher education. Linitā provided the cultural expertise, showing me how to re-imagine and re-frame Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural capital from a Tongan lens, whereas Alison shared her expertise of institutional knowledge and academic writing and practices in a way that nurtured my own critical thinking and writing.

I was responsible for supporting students with their research methodologies at a writing retreat for Pasifika postgraduate students held at the Uni-

versity of Auckland in December 2019. Most students deliberately utilized Indigenous research frameworks and methodologies in their projects, which to me suggested an intentional decision not only to research using Indigenous research frameworks but also to theorize and write using Indigenous ideas and concepts. They shared that their sense of connection-with (or disconnection from) their parents' and grandparents' heritage languages and cultures drove their decision-making. It is important to understand that a certain level of vulnerability is exposed when working within an Indigenous research paradigm. While one might want to dig deep into their Indigenous knowledge and thought, one may not feel they have the language or cultural competency to do so, particularly if there are few guides available to support students along the path. I worry that having few Moana-Pacific-Pasifika academics who have the appropriate cultural knowledge and language needed to guide students can result in a kind of defaulting to western research approaches. I write about this and other vulnerabilities and challenges elsewhere (see Fa'avae, 2019).

## Ko e Talanoa ke Hokohoko Atu: Conclusion

'Ko e vā mo e veitapui ko ha ongo me'a mahu'inga ki he fokotu'utu'u 'o ha fekumi pe ko ha fakatotolo 'oku fekau'aki mo e mahu'inga 'o e ngaahi tala 'a e Tonga 'i he mala'e 'ekatemika. 'Oku mahu'inga 'a e talatalanoa moe talanoa koloa 'o e to'utangata Tonga koe'uhi 'oku hā 'i he vā mo e veitapui 'a e lōloto mo e mataotao ange 'a e 'ilo mo e poto 'a e Tonga. Doctoral being and becoming is an ongoing process of navigation and negotiation. Decolonial potentialities can be re-imagined and their possibilities realized when Indigenous Pacific researchers learn to work-with and apply Indigenous knowledge and concepts, such as vā and veitapui, and story their doctoral encounters and experiences through ongoing talatalanoa. Theorising from an Indigenous and decoloniality position and centering Tongan knowledge and concepts empowered my thinking and writing in academia. This chapter not only contributes knowledge to discourse linked to doctoral writing within discursive spaces but also raises the criticality of doctoral writing as a tool for re-claiming self-determination for Indigenous researchers. Working-with the hyphen has enabled me to apply Indigenous knowledge and concepts within a dominant western space. I hope this chapter has demonstrated how vā and veitapui are significant in navigating and honoring the re-presentation, re-telling, and re-interpretation of our stories that underscore fluidity, richness, and nuances in the lived realities of Moana-Pacific-Pasifika peoples' lived realities in the diaspora.

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