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“Call... and they will come”. Navigating Pacific indigenous wisdom(s) in Pasifika education research.

Abstract:

The act of blowing of the conch shell derives from ancient Polynesian custom(s), that invites the attention of the God(s) and peoples; in acts of invoking direct communication between peoples, place and spirit. The call of the conch shell ‘ili le pū’ opens ethical, embodied metaphysical encounters for people, spirit and place (not only the act of human capacity, but the materiality of the shell-ocean-air-breath-life). Within this paper, the sound of the conch is explored to ‘logologo atu’ as an expressive act that moves beyond conventions of language, representation and an expectation of fixed meanings. Working with both indigenous Pacific epistemology and posthuman philosophy, the intention for this paper is to approach research engagement and ethics that are ontologically based on forms of life rather than ideas and ideals of universality (Matapo, 2016). Coming to know the self in relation to others, past and present, the cosmos, land, seas, and skies, is something done within a Pacific collective that understands itself as part of a greater whole (Meyer 2014). As a Samoan Pasifika doctoral student traversing Pasifika education research, I ask how the act of the conch shell call ‘ili le pū’ may further the collective spirit of Pacific indigenous wisdom(s) in Pasifika education research. Furthermore, how an ontology of presence (Mika, 2015), that is both generative and embedded, may (re)connect Pasifika peoples in and with Oceania (Hau’ofa, 1994; 2008).

Keywords (Limit 6 keywords):

Pasifika education research, Pacific indigenous wisdom, posthuman, collective

Introduction:

The opening words of the abstract start with ‘the act of blowing the conch shell’ and it is in this act that trajectories are opened, stories within stories and the movement of the body (what is materialised) express voice without words. The engagement with this Polynesian custom

evokes a metaphysical commitment, however not as an essentialised position but as an immanent nexus that calls to spirit, place and the material all of which locate in and with Pacific cosmogony (the stories of creation, of cosmos, peoples and existence). The paper starts with an exploration of social and political histories of the Pacific and then moves into Oceanic¹ onto-epistemology (Hau’ofa, 1994; Ingersoll, 2016; Matapo, 2018; Thaman, 2003; Tui Atua, 2009; Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017). The conch shell is storied throughout the paper as a way to experiment with sound/blow/voice, incorporeal² and corporeal bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and the possibility for re-imagining Pasifika³ education research. As a Samoan/Pasifika doctoral student engaging with Pacific indigenous epistemology and posthuman philosophy, I have grown increasingly sceptical of the dialectical presupposition and representation of textualized language/thought, which is also contested by many Pacific indigenous scholars (Matapo, 2018; Mika, 2015; Thaman, 2003). In an attempt to disrupt conventional modes of writing I share my researcher considerations, questions that **I implicitly wrestle with throughout this paper** as I engage in poetry, imagery and storying. Thus I attempt to share, with you the reader a processual movement of writing/thinking/becoming.

First call...ili le pū fa’atasi

Researcher considerations: Wrestling in thoughts/writing/becoming

- How has the body been colonised?
- What is constrained in the body when thinking takes a priori position?
- How is metaphysical becoming embodied in the assemblage of mind, sense, matter and wisdom?
- In the call of the conch, what ruptures when sensations are felt under the skin, in the blood, through artilleries?
- Like Oceania as a body of water, what are the affective capacities of the body? (human and non-human).

It is here, from the middle I locate my ontological position within Pasifika education research as a rhizome of the multiple; Samoan, Palagi, New Zealander, daughter, mother, learner, early childhood teacher, leader, lecturer, Pacific academic and researcher and other...

“A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p 25).

My commitment to Pasifika education research within Aotearoa is greatly influenced by my personal and professional experiences. This is inclusive of the various ways I have journeyed in and traversed with education and education research; as a child, a teacher, a leader, a student,

¹ Pacific indigenous scholar Epeli Hau’ofa wrote extensively about the lasting effects of colonizing regimes of anthropologic research in the Pacific, particularly the geographical naming and so-called division of the Pacific Ocean (Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia). He contested such geographical divisions of Pacific spheres and the notion of the many Pacific islands as being small islands, thus the concept of Oceania uphold the complex and genealogical relationship between waters, cosmogony and peoples. The waters of Oceania are acknowledged as a place of belonging, as well as ties to (fanua/fenua) land.

² Incorporeal refers to virtual and actual events and singularities on a plane of consistency, belonging to the pure past – the past that can never be fully present (Boudas, 2010).

³ The concept of Pasifika was coined in the mid-1990s as a bureaucratic terminology grouping together Pacific Islands peoples living in New Zealand (either New Zealand born or migrant). In more recent years, the term Pasifika has been reconceptualised by Pasifika to represent a symbol of unity rather than a homogenous grouping of Pacific Islands peoples (Wendt-Samu, 2006). Pasifika ethnicities include Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue and Tuvalu (Leaupepe & Suani, 2014).

a lecturer. Being a New Zealand born Samoan and Pasifika early childhood education lecturer, I am cognisant of my presence teaching and advocating for marginalised Pacific indigenous knowledge and pedagogy within a predominant Western ideologically based education sector. This tension is not only relevant in my work as an initial teacher educator, but also within my role as an academic where the very social, political histories are grounded upon Western philosophy and transcendental metaphysics. Although I intentionally and critically locate myself within a typically Western paradigm of education, I continue to contest dominant discourse that privileges itself and continues to marginalise indigenous knowledge. Through my relationships, interactions and experiences within broad education contexts (early childhood, primary school and tertiary) I have become increasingly critical of taken-for-granted existential truths, notions of the human subject and how this influences the place of valued knowledge(s) in education and education research.

The act of critique by way of Pacific indigenous thinking opens a cosmic paradigm that affects spatio-temporality of being, between human and Ocean. This way of conceptualizing belonging to Oceania (not only Islands) is significant to me personally, as I operate to decolonize education and Pacific research from a location other than my ancestral lands of Samoa. I have grown an affinity to specific places, my maunga (mountain), my awa (river), my shared connection with whenua (placenta/land) and lasting relationships with tangata whenua (indigenous peoples of Aotearoa). Through Pacific research and by way of storying, I am coming to understand and reconceptualise the collective histories of Māori with Oceania and Pacific peoples in my own becoming.

The following stories of the conch present Samoan and Māori cosmogony, which connect peoples to gods, place, waters, and spirit across time and space.

Second call...ili le pū fa'alua

Stories of the conch – breath/ocean/vibration/voice

The call of the conch shell in Polynesian ceremonies are storied in this section, with particular attention given to indigenous cosmogony of Samoa and New Zealand (places that are of significance to my personal onto-epistemological commitment in research). The conch shell call in Samoa remains an integral part of Fa'a Samoa (Samoan way of life) today and can be heard throughout villages to mark the opening of sacred events such as times of prayer or is used to call people together for meetings and gatherings. The pū (sound of the blow), connects with Polynesian histories in protocols, in that the pū has power to invoke direct connection to Tagaloa, who is progenitor in Samoan cosmogony. The conch shell, comes from the ocean and carries a particular genealogy of creation and spirit, shared with ocean. The significance of the pū resonates (in sound vibrations) an ethical commitment to place, ocean and people across time and space (Fa'alogu, E, personal communication, September 20, 2018).

For Māori, the putatara (Māori conch shell trumpet) is also used to call iwi (tribes) together, to meet at sacred and significant times, such a mourning for recently diseased. The putatara encompasses a spiritual capacity and is called at times of spiritual and tribal practices. The sound of the putatara offers another voice to be heard. The putatara is different to the larger conch shell trumpets of Polynesia, and the making of the putatara expresses another story of cosmogony. Tane Mahuta the god of the forest descended from the heavens carrying Te Kete O Te Wananga (the three baskets of knowledge) which were gifted from his father Rangi. Tane Mahuta left behind the putatara as a koha (gift). When the putatara is made, wood is drilled

into the shell to form the mouthpiece and it is in the process of bringing these two components together (ocean and forest) that the putatara becomes a physical and spiritual assemblage (body) of the sacred gift from gods Tane Mahuta and Tangaroa god of the ocean (Te Kuiti Stewart, 2016).

The following imagery juxtapositions different epistemic positions in visual forms of putatara, the original photo taken in 1987 as part of an anthropological archiving project to ‘capture’ Māori artefacts in exhibition at the Auckland museum. The other image (Fig. 2) explores the affective and spiritual capacities of the putatara image, generating transversal lines as vibration of sounds. The pū, breath/sound/vibration/call engages an Oceanic onto-epistemology⁴, where sense as knowing is grounded in the belly, embodied as incorporeal intersectionality of the virtual/actual that escapes stratified language signification (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Spiller, Barclay-Kerr, & Panoho, 2015). The differing epistemologies presented in these images, tell very different stories of personhood, matter, subjectivity and the Oceanic indigenous human-subject.



Fig. 1. Original image - Shell Trumpet, putatara (Brett, 1987)

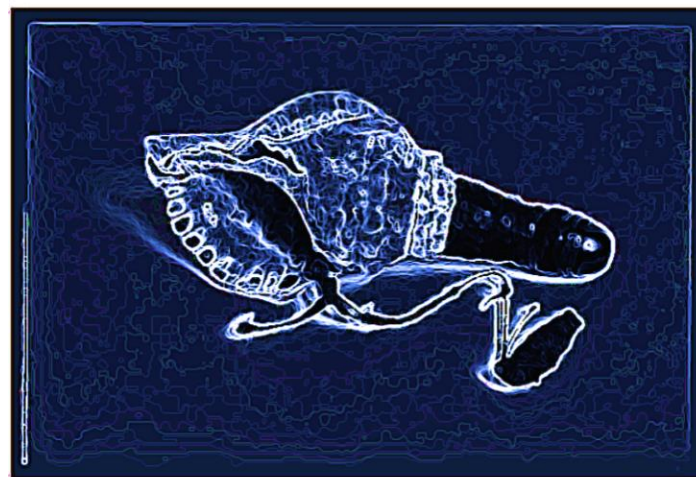


Fig. 2. Pū - *Lines as vibration: Impressions of putatara* (Matapo, 2018).

Before moving on, I indicate here that I use the term ‘Indigenous’ cautiously as the practice of labelling static definitions are in fact problematic and contradict indigenous practice (Mika,

⁴ *Onto-epistemology* involves the study of practices of knowing-in-being. Barad’s onto-epistemology makes the point (also made by Deleuze and Guattari however, from an alternative starting point) that ontologically, nature and culture, cannot be differentially privileged, and that constructedness does not deny materiality (Barad, 1996).

2017). In addition to these tensions, is the historical colonising label of Indigenous which have political and systemic intentions to fix definitions of specific ethnic groups. So, from here I question how education regimes continue to marginalise Pacific indigenous onto-epistemology and what this means for Pasifika peoples continuing to negotiate education and education politics. Re-imagining the human subject as generative and emergent becoming(s) rather than a universalised subject may change dominant views of success in education. I would like to return to the human subject, that of the ‘majoritive’ human subject, the human subject that stems historically from the ‘great chain of being anchored in patriarchal structures and ideology (Braidotti, 2013). This particular human subject is a western view that places the human subject in a particular hierarchical order, first being god and subsequently human, sentient beings, plants and then non-living.

Third call...ili le pū fa’atolu

Pacific peoples and Aotearoa – Traversing lines and political tensions

To provide historical context to Pasifika education research in Aotearoa/New Zealand the following section will engage in stories of Pacific peoples migration to Aotearoa and signal to the unique shared histories between Pacific peoples.

Hau’ofa (2008) has explained the economic networks across the Pacific have come into one particular economy, which shares in one dominant culture that increasingly marginalises local subcultures. With this we see a process of decolonising however, contrary to its intentions (in that the colonial presence be lifted, socially, politically and economically) it ties specific connections to Australia and New Zealand economy and society, whereby the Pacific nations are unable to detangle themselves. For countries in the South Pacific there is a single economic system that is directed by transnational industrial, commercial and financial interests which are supported by governmental organisations (p. 11). Hau’ofa (2008) suggests that by isolating the South Pacific economy by region to that of the world economy, recognises the South Pacific as specific subgroup that aligns with geographical, economic, social, cultural ties; inclusive of the well-being and security of this part of the world. By South Pacific, Hau’ofa refers to “...the region covered by Australia and Papua New Guinea in the west, Kiribati in the north, New Zealand in the south, and the Cook Islands in the east” (p. 11).

Another major foreign exchange indicated in Hau’ofa’s (2008) chapter ‘The New South Pacific’ is the transportation, financial and communications systems tied to both Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand are major exporters of the South Pacific Islands, however the complexity of these relations is multi-faceted in that Australia and New Zealand should not be viewed so narrowly as the main beneficiaries (this is changing in recent developments and increasing international interests and presence in the Pacific Islands). In terms of who benefits from the point of view of the regional economy is generally the elite groups, those who are directly or indirectly concerned with the economic activities of private and public sectors in the South Pacific. “These elite groups are locked to each other through their privileged access to and control of resources moving within the region and between the South Pacific and other regions of the world” (p.12). As part of this ruling class of the South Pacific there is an increasingly homogeneity of language (English) and the embedding of the same ideologies and material life styles. From a classical liberalist philosophical position, there is a change in relationship to property, rights and ethics when Western ideologies become normative in societies structural political processes. The influence of neoliberal politics bring about new and emerging global relations and is advancing within regions. The place of

consumerism, informing a particular subjectivity is changing the way cultural onto-epistemology of the person or personhood as entangled in the collective (with place, land, waters, cosmogony). I ask how personhood in Pacific regions have taken on dominant global ideologies?

Hau'ofa (2008) explains the division of class, that of elitist groups and the privileged in controlling resources which perpetuates inequality and increases disparity. "The privileged classes share a single dominant regional culture; the underprivileged maintain subcultures related to the dominant one through ties of patronage and growing inequality...Cultural diversity is also largely found among the underprivileged classes especially in rural areas" (p. 13). Depiction of the Pacific has and still remains to some extent, a romantic and paradisiacal space as promoted within tourism. This misrepresented image of the Pacific has been used to commercialise an 'Island' experience where spaces in the Pacific are seen as idyllic and peoples are passive and submissive, where cultural practices and traditions are merely entertainment for pleasure of visitors. This sort of commercialised experience of cultural practices and traditions also transfers into the selling of cultural artefacts as commodification of cultural arts experiences. "The commercial representation conceals the painful stories and suffering and the lost stories of oppression under colonial rule and profiling" (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017, p 9). The diaspora is also inclusive in the notion of broader 'Pacific', this can refer to a group or persons, that have biological, economic, political, religious, social or educational connection to the Pacific. The Pacific extends beyond direct positionality, rather is connects peoples and groups to the Pacific as an extended family (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017).

These political, social and economic tensions within Pacific regions are not new and for many Pacific peoples who migrated to New Zealand in the 50s, 60s and 70s, is part of their collective narrative. The opportunities for education, employment and the ability to contribute financially to family members in the Islands were positive motivators for many Pacific peoples (Matapo, 2016). The influx of Pacific peoples migrating to Aotearoa was largely induced by the increasing demand of the manufacturing sector, between the 1950s – 1970s. This labour demand required skilled and semi-skilled workers, for which employers turned to people of the Pacific (Spoonley, 2013). During the time of economic productivity within the manufacturing sector there was little concern about the increase in migration of Pacific people, to an extent of relaxed immigration restrictions towards Pacific migrants (on working visas), however when the economic crises arose and unemployment became an issue, the Labour Government sought to deport those particular Pacific migrants. The way in which Pacific peoples were targeted as the 'problem' in taking jobs of New Zealanders and therefore one of the major causes of the economic issues was portrayed in media and by the public. Such contentious labelling and shaming of Pacific peoples as so called 'overstayers' was exacerbated by immigration policies to target the deportation of Pacific peoples by way of dawn raids. This economic crisis in New Zealand demonstrated the fragility of New Zealand's economy and capital. This event foreshadowed tensions within society, particularly the portrayal of Pacific people taking valuable employment opportunities for New Zealand residents, although the majority of illegal working migrants were from Europe and South America (Spoonley, 2013).

The motivation for policy and research engagement (1990 - 2018) in Aotearoa in Pasifika education has been predominantly driven by the over-representation of lower achievement outcomes, lower socio-economic outcomes and poorer health statistics and the view of Pasifika peoples burden on our national economy (Matapo, 2018). This deficit representation of Pasifika

peoples in Aotearoa remains contested by Pasifika peoples, resisting discourses that 'label' Pasifika as underachieving. In more recent years, approaches in Pasifika education research have become more centred around transformative paradigms, entailing social justice, equity and inclusive engagement in Pasifika education research. Nevertheless, the limitations of such research paradigms, that being transformative through a critical Marxist framing presents very different onto-epistemological commitments in knowing, being and becoming. Meyer (2014) suggests that the academy (and I would suggest Pasifika education research) must go beyond an entrenched one truth epistemology.

“It is time to expand the discussion of knowledge with a more ancient capacity linked to land, water, people, and language. Time to extend knowing beyond cognitive accumulation perfectly rendered in textual form. Here is a space for mindfulness to enter the academy via chant, insight and spirit. We are long overdue for intelligence that recognises patterns of continuity and remembers the purpose of culture” (Meyer, 2014, p. 157).

Fourth call...ili le pū fa'afa

Calling upon Oceanic research and epistemology

Having spoken of the political histories, and the intersecting lines of social and economic influence upon Pacific regions, people and culture, I will engage Pacific scholars who have in acts of resistance, deterritorilised and reterritorialised place(s), people and seas.

The evoking of Pacific world view(s) have been explored by Pacific philosophers in contesting and critiquing anthropological research paradigms that have studied Pacific society and culture without consideration of Pacific epistemology (Wilson, 1999). Pacific educators including Nobobo, Helu Thaman, Taufe'ulungaki and Teweiariki from the University of the South Pacific have engaged in research centred upon Pacific philosophy which concedes Pacific ways of knowing and learning (Matapo, 2016). The concerns shared by these Pacific educators and researchers are to affirm the distinctive Pacific understandings of the nature of knowledge, and ensure the integration of indigenous knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence within formal educational curricula within the Pacific regions. The work of these Pacific educators extends to New Zealand and the wider world. This poses a problem with the concept of Pacific diaspora and the impact of globalisation and what this may mean for sustaining of Pacific indigenous knowledge (Huffer & Qalo, 2004).

Ingersoll's (2016) book 'waves of knowing' describes of her relationship to the Ocean as a seascape epistemology, connecting to the shared histories of migration and cultural exchange amongst Oceanic peoples, each however with their own unique history, culture, language and geography and as she cautions, should not be essentialised. Peoples of Oceania share many values and beliefs that are brought together by the common sea surrounds and shapes culture. The concept of Oceania that Hauofa (1994) conceptualises opens a spatio-temporal realm/void/opening/noa that generates possibilities for fluid identity formations that are both multiple and complex (this is a foci for Ingersoll in her conceptualising of seascape epistemology). There are concerns, however that in creating a universal vision of Oceania for Oceanic peoples there runs the risk of essentialization. There are however, diverse loyalties that are strong and take hold against homogenising global forces, the focus must shift towards the strengthening of ancestral cultures to regain lost sovereignty (Hau'ofa, 1994). There must

be a reconceptualising of between indigenous notions of home and away and the complexities of dynamic local difference (not in opposition or binary).

“Seascape epistemology engages a discourse about place that recognizes the ocean’s transient and dynamic composition; waves are constantly formed and broken, sucked up from the very body that gave it life. No part of this liquid body is ever stable. Yet something does endure within this space and time: relationships that draw together sea’s collective components through engagement such as he’e nalu. Seascape epistemology is movement’s sound, it’s taste and color, and it is the fluctuation of a process that joins the world together” (Ingersoll, 2016, p 20).

Seascape epistemology builds upon a decolonising methodology for Kanaka (local Hawaiian peoples) as it reveals hidden linkages between lands and water that speak to indigenous ways of knowing and being, “to historical means of political, social, and cultural survival” (Ingersoll, 2016, p 21). Seascape epistemology or Oceanic onto-epistemology express processual movements of ‘decolonising’, that question, critique political, social, economic, historical discourses of knowledge. The process of decolonising requires wisdoms – rather seeking wisdom (Tofa Saiili) – liuliu-unthinking or deconstruction, liliu-rethinking, reconstruction (Toe liuliu)- return, which are specific examples of Samoan concepts (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017).

I now ask, why the surge in ‘decolonising’ research frameworks in indigenous philosophy and research in education? Editors Vaai & Nabobo-Baba (2017) of the book *the relational self, decolonising personhood in the Pacific*, have provided a provocation for thinking or unthinking personhood. What is evoked here, is the process of deterritorialising the ‘colonised’ personhood and a reterritorializing of the indigenous Pacific personhood. What is challenged is the notion of ‘reconstruct’, perhaps due to the historical connection to ‘rationalist’ discourses. “We cannot just reconstruct. A foundationless decolonisation process would end up either repeating what we want to deconstruct or unreflectively removing or adopting foreign worldviews as our foundation” (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017, p. 6). By way of relationality that is critical to indigenous cultural and faith traditions of Pacific peoples these authors invite a grounding of decolonising of personhood “...which has to emerge from the iturangi⁵ of the people” (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017, p. 6).

The concept of self in Pacific societies as explained by Vaai & Nabobo-Baba (2017) is always a relational-self, that is constituted by relations, where the relational-self is the part of the whole and the whole part of the self that is irreducible to the sum of its parts.

“The challenge in the current decolonisation of personhood is twofold. One the one hand, how can Pacific islanders rediscover this relational aspect of their personhoods, not only to address the issues at hand but also to reconstruct a life that is fully communal yet embraces individuality and distinctiveness?” (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017, p 6-7).

The need for indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and cosmological ideas and philosophy must be considered in global conversations, thus consideration of local indigenous

⁵ The Samoan term Itulagi itu means side, and lagi, means heavens. Itulagi literally means ‘side of heavens’. This itu constitutes ones’ thinking, including culture, family, religion, people, land, ancestors, ocean, language, spirits and the tualagi – *universe* (Vaai & Casimira Cited in Toso & Matapo, 2018).

understandings can support the way in which Pacific peoples are governed – taking ownership of decisions made with regards to land, seas, people and knowledge (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017).

Fifth call...ili le pū fa'alima

Calling into question Pasifika research –

Pasifika education research requires a re-imagining of ethics and research processes, so as to engage Indigenous wisdom in being in, and with, the world. With this said, there is also significance in applying the same rigour to traditional cultural knowledge systems and broader cultural constructs from within a cultural onto-epistemological position. The separation of Pacific indigenous knowledge from the influences of colonisation is not so clear-cut and offers new and emerging formations of being and subjectivity (Clifford, 2013; Matapo, 2016). In evaluating claims of knowledge/knowing/understanding, Pasifika education researchers must go further than dichotomous thinking, as we consider more deeply the harmony between human and non-human – such as the call of the conch shell brings attention to place, peoples, ocean, lands in embodied knowing that is relational.

Closing words in poetry...

Ili le pū – *Hear the call of the conch*

Deep is the sound, felt in your body
Hear the call, sensations under your skin
Stirring movement in knowing self
Calling upon ancestors, gods, spirit, time and space
Knowing does not belong to you alone

Deep in the earth, the call vibrates
Felt under the feet of those before.
Fanua with its own life forces and flows
Regenerates new life with old.
Knowledge has constraints, unlike the wisdom of fanua

Deep is the breath you take to blow.
The winds around you, share in your breath
To fill your lungs, give life to your blood and brain
Breathe in your knowing, breathe out your wisdom
Generate understanding

Deep are the waters of Oceania
Ili le pū, another voice calls
Waves of unrest, spirit unsettled
Our Oceania is dying, listen to the call
Knowledge has constraints, Oceania speaks
Knowing does not belong to you alone

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