4

‘The plurality of hoa’: Tā-vā and Moana thought in the work of Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu ‘Ōkusitino Māhina, an interview

Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu ‘Ōkusitino Māhina
with Albert L. Refiti

Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu ‘Ōkusitino Māhina was an associate investigator for the ‘Vā Moana: Space and Relationality in Pacific Thought and Identity’ project and is a foundational proponent of tā-vā, with much of his life’s work leading to the development of Tā-Vā Theory and Philosophy of Reality. As a longstanding collaborator with Vā Moana—Pacific Spaces, Māhina, in this conversation or talatalanoa, continues a decades-long discussion on vā and tā-vā with Albert L. Refiti. In what follows, Māhina shares his experiences as a student at ‘Atenisi Institute, with the late Futa Helu, and the emergence of his own ideas on vā. He sees vā not only as a system that structures relationships, but also as an integral part of artistic endeavours in Moana societies that incorporate the rhythmic beating and marking of time. Hūfanga’s PhD thesis, which became the first theory of history from an Indigenous Moana perspective, promoted the notion of an Indigenous Tongan history as Talaēfonua.[1]

1 For the edited recording of this talanoa, see: Māhina (2022).

Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu ʻŌkusitino Māhina: I was born and bred on the island of Vāvaʻu, north of the main island of Tongatapu. It is exciting to mention that there is this common belief that vāvaʻu was first settled by Samoans followed by Fijians. Then the name Vāvaʻu is thought to be Samoan, probably derived from Tala o le vāvau, which is the incoming Samoan powerful influence from the people who settled the whole island, probably following former waves of migrations. But that is the shared belief amongst the people of Vāvaʻu and the whole of Tonga. That would be something I'm proud to say, that we come from Sāmoa. We have Samoan names all over the landscape—Fangatongo is one, Neiafu is another, Utulei, Utungate: these are names thought to be of Samoan origins. My paternal ancestors came from Haʻapai to Vāvaʻu, and my maternal side was originally in Vāvaʻu, in the village of Leimatuʻa and other villages.

Albert L. Refiti: You went to school in Vāvaʻu?

HŌM: My mother was a strict disciplinarian, and deeply religious. On the one hand she was a fine artist in her own right, notably in the making of mats and tapa. In addition, she was also a material and performance artist, specifically speech making and speech giving. She was my teacher. And unconsciously and consciously I absorbed the skills—fine speech making and speech giving, mainly in the religious area. When she prayed, she spoke in poetry, and you cannot ask for more than the beauty of that. Just the rhythm, the rhyme. At first I didn't really appreciate it, but of course I was there. I grew up in the house surrounded by many members of my relatives on both sides. This whole collective doing things, knowing and seeing, I still believe that many of those things are in my blood. I occasionally recall many of her words, the words she used and her technique—it was just amazing.

On the other hand, my father wasn't that strict, he was more liberal. Like my mother, he was a great fisherman and domesticator of plants and animals, both of which are kind of performance arts, you see. He hardly spoke. He wasn't an orator like my mother, but he was a great maker of implements and instruments for fishing, for planting, and anything to do with those fields.

Both my father and my mother didn't really have an education in the Western sense, but they did have education in the Tongan sense, and they were deeply embedded across whatever they did. In my mother's case, tapa making, mat weaving, oratory—speech making and speech giving—and my father was deeply endowed with all these different forms of knowledge

skills and in tool making and in art-making. Of course, there is this basic difference in Western education, which is largely school based. Tongan education, on the other hand, is based on haʻa or sā (clan based), which can be defined as a professional class of fisherman, or navigators, or housebuilders, or boatbuilders, or different types of fishing, you know.

ALR: So when it came to your journey in education, where did you start?

HŌM: I started in a church school in vāvaʻu, then the 7th Day Adventist intermediate school where I did two years. Then I went to Tongatapu to Piula College and then from there to a government college, Tonga College. Then I accidentally landed at ʻAtenisi … my father was determined that I must go to ʻAtenisi, he said this is where you belong. Futa Helu [the founding director of Tonga's ʻAtenisi Institute] was a great holder of knowledge and skills. Futa was known around Tonga as a wiseman, well educated, well versed and well mannered—very humble, respectful, very down to earth. I saw him with those qualities, because he invited us to kava. His wife made the kava where we were received and we were talking away about anything and everything, but he always came back to ʻAtenisi. That is when I knew that ʻAtenisi was the capital of Greece. I didn't know where Greece was.

ALR: How old were you at this stage?

HŌM: I think I was 16. I was there for the first two weeks and then I was transformed that quickly. I really liked the place. Especially the teaching. It was so different from my former teachers, very markedly different. That is when I said, 'aha! this is where I belong', as my father said. That is when I began not minding the look of ʻAtenisi—old houses, falling, with coconut thatched roofs and walls and all that kind of stuff. I think it was Futa who really gave me the inspiration there and then. It was only for two weeks. He taught the teachers, he trained them as equals at ʻAtenisi, they spoke well, they taught well. Many, if not all of them, taught like Futa and spoke like Futa and spoke deeply about life, about their subjects, which was a marked difference from my former schools and teachers at schools. I did my school certificate there. I topped the class, we did the New South Wales syllabus, which was very rigid, high-level kind of stuff. Then I finished my university entrance, the higher education New South Wales syllabus and then I began teaching. After two years we began the university at ʻAtenisi, but only on an experimental basis. We did all the courses—philosophy, logic, symbolic and formal English, Greek, literature, languages and pure mathematics, physics on a university level. It was a thrill. It wasn't easy, it was difficult, but I found

it a blessing for me to be pushed into this area, new level of education—university so to speak. The good thing was the Tongan culture was also taught up to university level, whereas across the whole of Tonga, especially the Ministry of Education, Tongan culture was only taught up to a high school level. At ʻAtenisi I think it was a foresight provided by Futa. He went to Sydney where he studied under the controversial realist philosopher John Anderson. That is when we slowly began to learn more about Futa's education. But he never studied Tongan culture formally.

Interestingly, when he came back he really made up for the missing link … he never accepted positions offered by the government of Tonga because Futa was one of the very few overseas university-educated Tongans. Instead, he immersed himself in the community by drinking kava and talanoa with the so-called knowledge holders, holders of skills and knowledge across the fields matāpule, orators, poets, fishermen, navigators, undertakers, old women in terms of their arts, cooking, barkcloth making, mat weaving. And then he also frequented this newly formed Fofoanga kava club made up of old men across different areas.

ALR: So he began this kava club?

HŌM: Yeah, I think he was amongst the founding members, but that is where he also was able to learn. In other words, this constituted the Tongan University for him where he was navigated, where he learned things Tongan, with depth, length, breadth and form. When we began the ʻAtenisi University he saw to it that Tongan culture was taught, notably kava protocol and etiquette, the presentation of koloa, food, oral history, Tongan poetry, Tongan music, Tongan dance—both competition and practise. He lined up old people who gave talks in their fields throughout the year in those courses and that is when I had my first university taste of Tongan culture taught at university level, as well as philosophy. Western philosophy, logic, English and Greek literature, pure mathematics, applied mathematics, electrical engineering, art history and art—mainly painting. They started off by Futa and then we had German philosophers who only came there because of interest in philosophy. Art historians from Europe, from the States, from Britain.

ALR: From your point of view, the relationship between traditional Tongan knowledge holders and these Western knowledges—what was that like at ʻAtenisi?

HŌM: Interesting and difficult. Yes, that paradox was there. But Futa never expanded on that very interesting paradox. Somehow it was left to us to work it out. We were not spoonfed, but we were given time and space to work things out ourselves. That is what I think to be true learning, it stuck here. Now I have a better idea of the paradox than before, even at that point in time and space. Somehow Futa leaned more towards the Greeks, and then to Europe, because he actually taught German idealism. That is when I first had my taste—the great ideas, the weaknesses. Same for the French rationalists—the strengths, the weaknesses. That is the good thing about Futa, he talked about both, not just one or the other. Now I understand them to be … always juggling those. And the British imperialism and American pragmatism, but then he spent a bit more time talking about Sydney realism because of his teacher, John Anderson.

I now can see that he had an interest in Tongan culture within which Tongan philosophy can be found, Tongan art, Tongan morality, ethics—you name it. It was never like the extent to which he emphasised and went out of his way to name the school 'Atenisi after Athens, you see. And that says a lot because he championed the Greeks, especially the early Greeks, the pre-Socratics' philosophy, literature, tragedy, comedy and all that.

ALR: Now I'm going to shift a number of years, right at the point where you landed in Canberra to do your PhD [at The Australian National University (ANU)]. Do you want to talk about that time for you and the formulation of some of your ideas that later became very important to your writings and work?

HŌM: Yes, when I did my PhD I was interested in this whole Tongan—and probably, Samoan, Moana Pacific or Moana Oceania—concept of Heliaki, which is defined by scholars working in Tonga, and Tongan scholars, notably Adrienne Kaeppler. She defines Heliaki as speaking one thing but really meaning another. I added a little bit to that backbone: Heliaki can be defined as metaphorically saying one thing but historically meaning another, so you juggle the metaphoric and historical—metaphors and reality, as in the case of sun for power or … wind for operation, death for love, sweets and flowers for sweethearts, and all that kind of thing, the juggling of the two … I took that to heart and mind, and I wanted to develop the theory and study of myths and legends. Then over time-space in the middle of the production of that thesis, I thought I arrived at some crucial end, some kind of an outcome: that in order for one to understand Tongan oral history, one has to dive deep into Heliaki to be able to read history in mythology and

poetry and oratory. If you don't, then there is no advancement of knowledge or refinement in development, because Tongan history is wrapped up in symbols and metaphors. Unless you make a sharp distinction between the symbolic or the metaphorical on the one hand and the actual historical on the other, then you are lost in the midst of things, in the complexity of events and states of affairs. That was my take on it. That is my PhD thesis.

ALR: After your PhD, you returned to Auckland in 1992. When did you first encounter Epeli Hau'ofa?

HŌM: I was still a university student in Tonga. He was the private secretary to the king (of Tonga). The director of USP [University of the South Pacific] Centre in Tonga and then from there to Fiji where he got into sociology and anthropology and related subjects. He wore this long beard, fluffy hair. He used to wear his long tupenu with the tapa cloth design—red, black with barkcloth design with his pipe. [*Laughter*] Smoking away, puffing away. I quietly admired the guy and never knew I was going to anthropology.

ALR: And so Epeli cut quite a striking figure, when you were a young man.

HŌM: He was unique, he was marked out as an intellectual that educated men, a wiseman. That was the impression I had. I never knew what he studied and what he did or where he did all his degrees and all that, but the mystery was a sort of excitement, 'Who is this guy?' All I knew was he was a wiseman, he was an anthropologist and I wanted to be like him differently, in a different way. Maybe a sociologist or historian. I kind of liked the way his outfit looked, and the way he dressed up, because he was so Tongan. Since then, I have dressed up like him.

Over time he frequented 'Atenisi. There were not many intellectuals back in those days like now and I found out later that he was in Australia when Futa was there, and both of them came from religious backgrounds, so that was one attraction and the other attraction was education. Futa was there to study and Epeli was there. So he was a friend and he admired what Futa did. He considered him a hero, a warrior—courage just to be different from the rest. Obviously, yes, 'Atenisi was a foreign idea, a foreign thing compared to the Ministry of Education, which was also a foreign and introduced thing, but he wanted to do things differently. I think he was somehow influenced by his former teacher, John Anderson, and his idea was that the search for knowledge was primary over the application of

knowledge. The mainstay of Tongan education and the whole of the Pacific into technical vocational applied education rather than critical, classical, with knowledge taking the lead over skill.

ALR: Now, I was going to shift from when you knew Epeli as a young student, to when you then encountered him here at the University of Auckland when he visited in 1985 as a fellow.

HŌM: That is when Epeli and I were a lot closer, because I was doing anthropology at the time and he was an anthropologist. By accident we met up here when I had seen him in Tonga, I said I never anticipated that I was going to do it like him. He gave me the push and encouraged me to continue in the field, and so I did. I love to see myself as both. He was responsible for labelling me as an historical anthropologist and combining the two, because he was one of my examiners of my PhD thesis. He was impressed by some of the things I said, but he also took the opportunity to critique some others, and I found both very constructive, the strengths and weaknesses upon which you build your thinking and feeling.

ALR: When you returned from ANU with your brand new PhD, you spent a couple of years at Massey University in 1993, 1994, and then around the mid-90s is when you first started to use the concept of tā-vā. Was it tā-vā first, or how did that come about in your thinking?

HŌM: A bit of both. Actually, the humble beginning was at ʻAtenisi, but it was fairly sporadic, all over the place, in a very unrefined sort of way because that is where I studied philosophy, logic, symbolic and formal English and Greek literature, mathematics. That is where I began to have a feel of tā-vā in my space. But only as they were given. I never fiddled with them or juggled them to get something out of it. I came across them as they were, propounded in these subjects, you see. It was not until I came to Auckland that I seriously began to think about time and space, mainly because I taught courses at ʻAtenisi when I went back from time to time during my field work and my time here at the University of Auckland. I taught courses in Moana Oceania, Moana Pacific political economy, and Moana Oceania and Moana Pacific arts. That gave me the grip on the handle in terms of the interplay of chaos to do with political economy and order to do with arts, you see. That gave me a push as a hoa (pair). I began to look closely into both concepts beginning with the main of the three Tongan divisions of arts—faiva (performance art), tufunga (material art) and nimameʻa (fine art)—where fai is an expression of time; vā is space and

tufunga; tu is a corruption of tā, time; and tufunga is surface, space, place. And, of course, nima (fine hands) and me'a, meaning thing, it is again time and space expressed differently—but essentially all three are about tā-vā: time and space. That was the humble beginning.

Then we met up with my students here at the University of Auckland and elsewhere (Tonga Research Association and Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania [ASAO] conferences). Firstly, with Tēvita O. Ka'ili and Nuhi Seve-Williams, they were the first students. The three of us began some serious ways to work on this. Ever since, there were more and more students and scholars joining the movement; it is a collective effort really.

ALR: What I'm interested in is this invention to separate tā from vā. When did that occur for you?

HŌM: Early in the process, especially in view of the three Tongan artistic genres: faiva, tufunga and nimame'a. We noticed that faiva is made up of tā and vā, time and space. Tufunga is the same, it is inseparably made up of tufunga. Tu is a variation of tā and funga means surface, space or place. So there you have the inseparability of tā and vā, therefore time and space, and likewise nimame'a. Nima is a definer of things, nimame'a refiner of things. Things that you use your hands as a fine instrument in fashioning, moulding into whatever art form you want to produce, as in the making of tapa cloth, the making of fine nets, the making of carvings, the making of pillowcases, embroidery, crochet—it is introduced fine arts, you see. That is when we begin to think that they are not separated, but connected and separated as a hoa through intersection. Then as we continue, we see more or less the same fundamental aspect of reality, of the tā and vā. Another common vessel, vāka, medium, or vehicle for the existence of things in reality.

Of course, just something I wanted to point out: that my education and training back at 'Atenisi in philosophy, logic, literature, art history, art, mathematics, physics and all that, gave me the upper hand in the formulation of this. Formerly it was all tā-vā *theory*, but we changed it to tā-vā *philosophy*, because tā and vā, time and space, are the fundamental materials in which all things exist, so you can't go beyond that—you are confined to that. The realism that I learned, picked up at 'Atenisi (especially Sydney realism, and the pluralism of Heraclitus and Ephesus) really gave me the upper hand because when you see tā-vā, it is time [and] space as the

common mediums. It is one of complexity and plurality, because it deals with reality, time-space. Again, from both a realist and tā-vāist perspective, knowledge is knowledge of tā and vā, time and space, of reality. So they all converged to give us the upper hand, to tie or dig deep into what is now considered as Tongan philosophy … It is not that we embellish the Sydney realism of John Anderson and the pluralism of Heraclitus on Tongan tā and vā. Tā and vā exhibit the same, parallel qualities as to realism and pluralism. They are all different ways of seeing one single level of reality.

In the case of John Anderson, he calls it realism by treating reality as the common medium, meaning time and space, whereas Tongan philosophy is based *right in* tā and vā, time and space, which is reality. So the parallel is there. They complement each other, but it is not an imposition of Western ideas on Tongan thinking and feeling. Many of the critics of tā-vā are of the opinion that this is just Western philosophy reworded in Tongan terms, but that is not true. They would be hard put to argue the way they do, because it is there, it is right in front of our eyes, our hearts, our minds. We discover the same single level of reality ourselves as Tongans, word it in Tongan as they do in Western terms, you see. Like the word *intersection*, we call it in Tongan *fakafelavai*, but they both mean the same thing. Connection, fakahoko in Tongan. Separation, fakamavae in Tongan. They are simply different ways of saying the same thing and that is the ultimate measure of truth.

ALR: Now, if I go back a little bit then, to kind of trace the genealogy of your thinking about tā-vā: at some time during the mid–late 90s, you started to write about art, and the work of Filipe Tohi. How important was that in your thinking through tā-vā at that time, or before it even became tā-vā? Did you write first about vā, before tā-vā?

HŌM: Yes, but not too distantly. One following the other, you know, but you are right, I began writing about vā, as in fai-vā. I didn't quite see that fai is 'to do', as a time marker. It wasn't until later that I saw that this is an expression of tā, which is called fai, fai is to mark, to beat, to hit, to strike.

ALR: So that essay that you wrote for Filipe's catalogue[2] in the 2002 exhibition [*Genealogy of Lines: Hohoko ē tohitohi*, at the Govett-Brewster], why did you think to express the notion of fai-vā or tā-vā in Filipe's work at the time?

2 Māhinā (2002).

HŌM: Actually, what Filipe did is tufunga lalava (master craftsman in sennit lashing), in material art. Somehow, I had the idea already, that line is a form of tā, lineal, spatial, and vā, of course. And more so when lalava involves the intersection of two lines, two kafa sennit—(processed coconut fibre) one is red, the other black (but that is for another time and another space to talk about red and black or kula/uli). And that is what you get, all you have are two lines, two chords or two sennit, red and black, and then you intersect them by connecting and separating, connecting and separating, to whatever kupesi you want to produce. You do it in such a way that if you want a manulua, you do it in such a technique that it spits out a manulua. If you want a fish, we call kauikalilo, you know a specific technique of intersecting just those two lines or two chords or two sennit to spit out a fish kupesi, or whatever you want. So it boils down to time and space, to tā and vā.

ALR: So it sounds like it was quite important, the making, the artist's use of pattern to denote the beginnings of some of the ideas?

HŌM: Of course. Actually, the work of Filipe Tohi as a tufunga lalava artist somehow took place concurrently without us knowing each other, until a little bit later when we met up and then we marvelled at each other's work: 'Oh, this is tā and vā, that's kupesi, that is tufunga lalava', you know. And then we fed off each other about our ideas—about his art and my scholarship, both about the same thing in different places with different materials. That one there is pen and paper—the intersection from mind and heart to pen and paper. They are from mind and heart to the two lines, the two sennit or cords. So that was the parallel, you see.

ALR: Can I take you back a little bit? There are some seminal important dates and meetings. The 2001 Tongan History Conference (Tākanga 'enau fohé: Tonga and its Diasporic Communities in the 21st Century 2–6 April) in Utah. That was an important conference for you to present some of these ideas and then to meet up with others who were thinking—

HŌM: I am glad that you remember that. I had two papers. I had presented my history driven paper—the other one was 'Tā, Vā and Faiva: "Time", "Space" and "Art"'. I wanted to, with the support of Tēvita O. Ka'ili] and Nuhi [Seve-Williams] to a certain extent, to encourage me to test it out amongst philosophers. There were philosophers from North America, some from South America, some from Europe. I was the only one from this part of the world.

ALR: How was the paper received? This was tā-vā and faivā.

HŌM: Yes tā, vā and faivā with the subtitle in English, 'time, space, and art'. But I got it all wrong, because *faivā* is not a translation of *art*, faivā is performance art! Then there's tufunga and nimameʻa. But, of course, tā-vā philosophy now was at its formative stage and we were still juggling with it. If I were to retitle it again, I would probably say something like 'tā-vā and art, a translation of art'—time, space and art—because Tongan arts are divided into three—faivā, tufunga and nimameʻa.

ALR: Those were the beginnings, aye. Now, at the Tongan conference, was that the first time you met Tēvita [O. Kaʻili]?

HŌM: It was the first time I met Tēvita. I thought he was about my age because of his oratory, poetry, maturity but I was wrong. He was vibrant, young, committed, determined, fearless and full of energy.

ALR: So that was really the first conference where tā-vā became really a movement?

HŌM: Yeah, as a humble beginning.

ALR: So it was either 2001 or 2002 when I presented to the university, and the Pacific community of the university, the ideas for the Fale Pasifika. Remember that? You were sitting in the audience and after the presentation I did, which I had based some of the ideas on vā, the first question was this guy at the back with the beard and a Rastafarian hat … I remember that time, you asked 'why are you talking about vā and not tā?' So that was the first time I heard this … The other important development of tā-vā from that Tongan conference was the ASAO conference. In 2009, you formed a group of Pacific anthropologists and also students of anthropology who then formed the ASAO panel session, 'Tā-Vā (Time-Space): The Birth of An Indigenous Moana Theory'.

HŌM: From the [United] States, Hawaiʻi, Australia, Sāmoa, here and Fiji, I think. Nuhi was there too, but it was Tēvita and I who created the session, and then we invited Ping-Ann Addo (Kula-He-Fonua) to join us. That is when we began to put together our papers over the years, in 2011, and it kind of dragged on. The collection didn't come out until 2017, that is how many years—six, seven years? The collection was titled 'Tā-Vā (Time-Space) Theory of Reality'. [In the 2021 journal of *Pacific Studies* second special issue, "Atamai-Loto moe Fakaʻofoʻofa-ʻAonga: Tongan tā-vā Time-Space

Philosophy of Mind-Heart and Beauty-Utility'],[3] we changed it from *theory* to *philosophy*, believing that theory is mind dependent, whereas philosophy is reality led. Your mind and heart go straight to reality. So this volume two is a bit narrower than before, but we wanted to address both mind and heart and beauty and utility with reference to Tongan poetry and oratory, where the issues of body, mind and heart are highly developed and highly refined, more so than in academia where it is hardly dealt with.

ALR: Now, I have a question over the differences in which tā-vā has developed, in terms of being very focused on process and action and materiality in relationship to the Samoan articulation of vā as relational connections, genealogies, gafa. Is there a strand, like the Samoan strand of thinking about vā, in Tongan culture?

HŌM: Of course, yeah. We have parallels in both situations you see. And I think, like Sāmoa, you see the same situation in Tonga where people commonly talk about vā, vā, vā, all the time.

ALR: Like tauhi vā—what does that mean in Tongan?

HŌM: Vā lelei, to keep social spatial relations. And less of tā. Tā becomes more frequently used in the area of arts. Like tā meʻalea—the playing of an instrument: tā piano, tā vailini (violin), tā fangufangu (flute), tā everywhere, everything.

ALR: Tēvita calls it time marking.

HŌM: Yes, you're right. I think in the Sydney realism, Anderson was only talking about tā as a definer of vā, but he hardly talks about vā, which is something that we added by saying an equation—a complete equation, tā (time) works like what you said, an action, and definer of vā space. Vā space is now option led and composed so that you have time as a definer, a verb; vā is a composer, a noun. Inseparable, indispensable entities. You can't run with tā without the vā, nor the vā without the tā, because one is a definer and marker of the other, and the other is a composer—which gives us a bit of comfort in treating both, which is often separated in the social arena like in the case of Sāmoa and in the case of Tonga. We often talk about vā more than tā, and then in other instances we talk more about tā without vā, but by bringing both, where tā time is a verb and it is action-led

3 Lear et al. (2021).

and a definer of vā, and vā is a noun and composer of tā, we are happy to see that of course they are inseparable. You can't deal with one without the other, and vice versa.

ALR: Is there an aspect where sometimes (at least in Sāmoa), vā becomes the word that denotes the seasons, or the returning of things and also as a kind of period to denote periods? Like you have in Hawai'i, where wā becomes the marker of periods, different vā, which is the same here in Aotearoa. Is there something similar in Tonga?

HŌM: That is a very good question. We have always found it difficult to comprehend, which means that it requires further critical thinking, in which case that is what we are doing now. So far we speak the same language as you just asked. We can see that we may be emphasising something, the vā of something, but there is little of tā there. We would like to lead with the two (they) are inseparable, but it can also be a matter of emphasis. The emphasis of vā over tā or tā over vā. However small it may be, we may be emphasising tā here and there but we would like to believe that there can be a minor element there of tā and vā, aye? And vice versa. Building on the assumption that they are inseparable, but it is a matter of human emphasis, because they are inseparable in reality. It is us … we organise time and space, and there are instances where we emphasise one or the other and vice versa, but they are there, that is what we'd like to believe. But I think that is an assignment for all of us to stick our heads together and continue in our master project. It is a common collective task … it is for all of us.

ALR: One of the things that occurred to me, with at least the theory as we understood it (before what is now going to be a philosophy), is that it is a very useful theory, the tā-vā theory of reality, as an analysis to art. I think it is a very different analysis of the different arts that we have. You are working on a project that uses at least the theory to analyse Tongan art. Do you want to elaborate a little bit more?

HŌM: Yes, yes. Going back to the issue of hoa, soa, binary, as we know now more than we knew then, I think they can both be used as theories of philosophy. Our shift from theory to philosophy, it is predominantly philosophical in a sense that theory is hypothetically based here. It is mind dependent. Whereas philosophy is the study of reality, we simply go straight to reality and observe things in reality, whether it is dance, or surfing, or flying, or praying, or whatever. [It is] the nature of the mind to know things out there, and it is also in the nature of the heart to feel things out there.

So you have the interplay of mind and heart, knowing and feeling, which is very much part of the [*Pacific Studies* second volume].[4] That is very much something that we focused on, in the place between the mind and the heart and knowing and feeling. Of that reality out there, which is what philosophy is all about, the study—the knowing, the feeling of reality, rather than the bringing of reality to here in the space and mind dependant, rather than reality led. But I think the point here is to deal with both as hoa, as soa. The mind dependency and reality dependency, or reliance, or whatever, is hoa. That is what we've just focused on, you and me. We grew up and we hear hoa. I call my good wife my hoa and my good wife calls me her hoa …

ALR: If there was a connection between philosophy and hoa, is that idea—I like the Māori definition of hoa as friendship.

HŌM: Yes, that is the relationship connection.

ALR: Friendship and the love of knowledge, which is the origin of philosophy. Then, tā-vā, there is a way that you talk about the past, present and future bound up in tā-vā. How do you articulate that?

HŌM: Yeah. Actually, if we can hark back to my PhD where I developed this theory, not philosophy, of the study of myths and legends, oratory and all that, which requires a sharp distinction between the metaphorical and historical …

ALR: So metaphorical, meaning the heliaki?

HŌM: Yeah, that is what heliaki means. In the case of Tonga, we have two terms for the past, kuohili—that which has passed, it is lineal and historical. The other one is kuongamuʻa—placed in the front; that's the metaphorical. The actual versus the metaphorical-poetical. For the present ['historical'], you have lotolotonga, which is now. [The metaphorical is] Kuongaloto, age in the middle or centre. For the future we have kaha'u, which is yet to come. It hasn't come, it is yet to come.

ALR: Something that is moving towards you.

HŌM: Becoming, to become.

ALR: Becoming, yeah. How do you say it?

4 Lear et al. (2021).

HŌM: Kahaʻu, one word, that which is yet to come. And the metaphorical, poetical, or symbolic, is kuongamuʻa (age in the past), but we also call it metaphorically kuongamuʻa. It is very clever. So the past is there, but the metaphorical name for the past is kuongamuʻa. Which is this: metaphorically, the already-taken-place-past, is brought before us to the front, to guide us in the present. And because the future is yet to take place, kahaʻu, it is brought behind us, guided by refined past experiences. You see the intersection of the historical-actual, and metaphorical-poetical. It is very clever, very interesting.

ALR: You call it a paradox—these paradoxical, moving back and forth …

HŌM: That is the word I think, it is metaphorical-paradoxical. Talking about the past which is behind us in front, and the future before us in the back, behind us.

ALR: What about the middle?

HŌM: Kuongaloto, age in the middle or centre, where both the past and the present are constantly—that is what we do now. What we are doing now, we are mediating the already-taken-place past and the yet-to-take-place future … If we bring the yet-to-take-place future to be guided by our past experiences, then that is ideal because we have an approximation of what is to come. Like the fisherman who looks up, thinks 'probably we won't fish tonight', because there are signs there from the past, therefore there is less hazard or danger in going fishing because you bring your past experiences to inform or guide whatever is to be.

ALR: So this is the essence of tā-vā as a kind of concept. In philosophy, you can have a philosophy but it really only works when it is a concept, or we have concepts that build a philosophy. So that seems like quite an important concept to have tā-vā as articulated or conceptually unfold. In that sense, it is quite a complete view of the world. And there could be a criticism that it is quite a rigid view of the world—how would you use that concept to explain cultural developments that are happening now, and are quite different?

HŌM: Generally, there has been a call for taking culture seriously in development, meaning to bring the past to the present in guiding us to the future. There will be less problems if we go back to the past because the past has seen the light of day, as in the Tongan term of honoʻaho meaning the age of light. We call the present honopō, the age of darkness. We are still

novices, we don't know what to do. But if we go back to the age of light, hono'aho, daylight, it can tell us more as to what we do here as we travel into the future.

ALR: I guess in terms of the historical, it is a quite well-defined field. So archives, for instance. The really interesting one in terms of the metaphorical, we don't have the metaphorical archives to make the historical work in how we think today. Mainly because it seems like the metaphorical is a practice, it's reliant on practise.

HŌM: It is a living culture.

ALR: It relies on the tufunga, the faivā, the nimame'a …

HŌM: You are dead right.

ALR: … because they are active practitioners of metaphorical maker of things, while in terms of the historical, there are a lot of archives that keep records, and things like computer programmes that can predict the future, but you need the active practice or practitioner to articulate it. Now, I was thinking, the metaphorical and historical, which I think is something that has been in your work since your PhD, or maybe even before that. We've shifted from using [the term] Pacific, to Moana. I wonder if there is a time that we start to think of the metaphorical as a Pacific concept, because it obviously is a Pacific way to do things. Is there a Pacific name or word that could define metaphorical?

HŌM: Let me go back to your point you made earlier, the losing of the metaphorical. Because it is both conceptual and practical, as we agree. I think you are dead right, if we can't preserve both we may end up with the historical [only] and we will be bound to lose a lot of knowledge. It is timely, spacely, that we give emphasis to both, not just the historical but also to the metaphorical. The lineal and the secular. Of course, when you put the secular then it is lineal, but then when you remove it, it comes back to the spiral metaphorical. If we are not careful, like what you said—I quite like what you reminded us, it will disappear.

ALR: I'm going to come near the end of our conversation. This is about the shift (what might be called 'decolonial') in the last maybe 10 years, and in your writing as well as others, from using 'the Pacific' as a way to talk about the region we work in, to using the word Moana. I know that

your recent essay in *Crafting Aotearoa*,[5] the essay that specifically sets out to make a point about using Moana Oceania. I am really interested in that coupling—why Moana and Oceania together? You know why I'm asking that, and I want to capture that in our compilation because I think Moana is the right way to approach a decolonial thinking about who we are and how to speak about who we are, but when you talk about ideas like 'historical' and 'metaphorical', it makes me think—why don't we use Moana words? We definitely have heliaki for metaphorical … Heliaki means the same as tupua in Samoan, a riddle.

HŌM: We say the same thing. 'Mateʻi-mai-heʻi-tupuʻa', meaning I've got a heliaki, I have got an issue wrapped up in heliaki, and then you give your tupuʻa. That is very true. I think tupua, in Samoan, is the wrapping up of historical events in metaphorical trappings.

ALR: That is exactly how it works.

HŌM: We may not use a collective Moana. I think that also works too. We need to come up with our variations … and use them, and use each others' concepts of the same thing. Why not? I use tupua, I use heiliaki and tupua, I use tupua and heliaki—why not? It is enriching and exciting. The plurality of hoa.

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5 Māhina (2019).

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