

Exploring Pacific Talanoa Research Methods in Visual Arts Installation and Performance Art
Practices.

Auckland University of Technology
School of Art + Design

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

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‘Ofa lahi atu.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 19 August 2021

Abstract

This practice-led PhD thesis encompasses a socially engaged installation and performance art practice that includes individual and co-operative performances. Performance art collectives—currently forming an important part of a Pacific art subculture in Aotearoa New Zealand—form part of a significant co-operative process. Through anecdotes of my own and my family’s lived experiences, from an inside or emic perspective, I set the tone and direction of the research and its approach to issues such as Pacific labour and ownership of fonua (land). The project explores the complexities of life and labour in the Pacific diaspora: how Pacific peoples adapt to relocation, issues of labour and laws around working, and how these play a part in our traditions, our living and family dynamics.

The thesis project revolves around some key installation and performance art projects that include: *she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina* (2017) and *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn’t* (2017), both exhibited in the Honolulu Biennial; *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016), a project at the Emilia Maud Nixon Garden of Memories in Howick, Tāmaki Makaurau; *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don’t be here for life like me* (2018) at Te Tuhi, Tāmaki Makaurau; and *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* (2019) at Sydney’s 4A, incorporating the installation *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000* (2019). These artworks are contextualised amongst other Pacific artists that I consider to be important as contributors to talanoa research methods in Aotearoa, including Edith Amituanai, Janet Lilo and Kalisolaite ‘Uhila. These comparisons to other Pacific artists function as talanoa between co-operative researchers/artists.

The exegesis discusses notions of talanoa as a research method in relation to an emic (insider) viewpoint, the limbo perspective of the Pasifika edgewalkers and a politics of performance. The thesis project explores several related research questions. How do forms of talanoa operate across different tukufakaholo (generations) and therefore timeframes? This includes how lived experiences and knowledge (as research) are passed down through generations. This question explores the dynamics of anga fakatonga (the Tongan culture and subsequent upbringing my parents gave me) whilst living in Aotearoa. In contrasting traditional notions of talanoa with more contemporary Pacific diaspora experiences of urban living, I ask how talanoa is negotiated by the Pacific edgewalkers on the margins, a term borrowed from Anne-Marie Tupuola. This leads to another research question: in that talanoa can sometimes seek forms of unity and equilibrium (noa), how does Pacific talanoa engage with forms of political criticism? Throughout the project I ask, what are the practical problems encountered with Pacific talanoa? The overall thesis project explores the role of the artist researcher seeking out co-operations with various participants and often debunking the idea of the privileged researcher as external to the research they participate in. This problem has been approached from my perspective as a Tongan socially engaged installation and performance artist negotiating the complexities of the Pacific diaspora.

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <u>Fakamālō/Acknowledgments</u> | <u>2</u> |
| <u>Attestation of Authorship</u> | <u>4</u> |
| <u>Abstract</u> | <u>5</u> |
| <u>Table of Contents</u> | <u>6</u> |
| <u>Preface</u> | <u>8</u> |
| Kiwi Bacon and Carlton Party Hire | 8 |
| Musician Funga‘onetaka | 9 |
| Halafaka‘ete: Verse 1 | 9 |
| Halafaka‘ete: Verse 2 | 10 |
| Halafaka‘ete: Verse 3 | 11 |
| My Ongo Mātu‘a | 11 |
| Tilbury Place: Avondale, Tonga and Land Ownership | 12 |
| <i>she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina (2017)</i> | 13 |
| Halafaka‘ete: Verse 4 | 15 |
| Honolulu Biennial, Ma‘o Organic Farms | 15 |
| Conclusion – after hours | 17 |
| Halafaka‘ete: Verse 5 | 19 |
| <u>Chapter 1: Talanoa</u> | <u>20</u> |
| Introducing Talanoa | 20 |
| Pacific Academic Literature on Talanoa | 21 |
| My Interpretation of Talanoa | 24 |
| Lived Research Experience | 26 |
| Pō Talanoa | 27 |
| Pō Talanoa at night, a different time zone, or afterhours performance | 30 |
| ‘Doing’ Talanoa | 34 |
| Practical Dilemmas of Talanoa | 35 |
| Inside or Outside | 40 |
| Indigenous Perspectives | 41 |
| Transparent storytelling, facilitating is shared | 44 |
| Conclusion | 46 |
| <u>Talanoa Usu 1: <i>One Kiosk, Many Exchanges</i> (2016)</u> | <u>47</u> |
| Want to play footy? Friday January 1 st , 2016 | 48 |
| What is Fencibles? Tuesday March 1 st , 2016 | 48 |
| Thursday March 17 th , 2016 | 49 |
| Invitation to a Group Exhibition - Saturday August 20 th , 2016 | 50 |
| Meeting with Kaitiaki Taini Drummond - Thursday September, 1 st 2016 | 52 |
| Gaining Trust | 53 |
| Wednesday September 17 th , 2016 | 54 |
| Giving voice | 54 |
| Limbo as a site of belonging | 55 |
| Participants | 55 |
| Emic/Insider Talanoa, Tuesday October 4 th , 2016 | 57 |
| The Performance, Saturday October 8 th , 2016 | 59 |
| Le Ula e, momoli atu e o‘u lima | 61 |
| Lota Nu‘u, ua ou Fanau ai | 66 |
| Conclusion | 69 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Chapter 2: The Emic Viewpoint (insider) | 70 |
| Emic and Etic | 70 |
| Ethnography and autoethnography: | 70 |
| Artists co-operating with the emic avenue | 71 |
| Edith Amituanai: <i>Keeping on Kimi Ora</i> | 71 |
| Janet Lilo: <i>Right of Way</i> | 77 |
| Kalisolaite 'Uhila: <i>Mo'ui Tukuhausia</i> | 79 |
| Chapter 3: Limbo/Pasifika Edgewalkers | 83 |
| It begins with the state of Pasifika edgewalkers | 84 |
| Pasifika Edgewalker: Anne-Marie Tupuola | 85 |
| Art from the Limbo/Pasifika edgewalker margins | 87 |
| How does agonism come into the limbo perspective? | 88 |
| Lived research experience through Pacific builders | 89 |
| <i>you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me</i> (2018) | 90 |
| Te Tuhi installation | 95 |
| Lived Research Experiences as Performance | 101 |
| Reconnecting to culture through lived experiences fonua, Matavai Taulangau | 103 |
| Lived experience through collectives | 108 |
| Conclusion | 112 |
| Talanoa Usu 2: Mo'okū'auhau as Tukufakaholo | 113 |
| Mo'okū'auhau as Tukufakaholo: past, present, future | 118 |
| Tukufakaholo ways of being through lived experiences passed down through generations | 119 |
| Talanoa as talk story: Mā'awe Pono – Kū Kahakalau | 120 |
| Talanoa relational compassion | 122 |
| <i>Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't</i> (2017) | 126 |
| Indigenous restrictions to accessing land ownership | 130 |
| Face-to-face, lived experiences | 132 |
| The Inside/Outside dilemma | 134 |
| Conclusion | 136 |
| Chapter 4 – How Talanoa is Political? | 138 |
| <i>If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?</i> (2019) | 141 |
| Talanoa as harmonious or critical? | 147 |
| Chantel Mouffe's Antagonism | 151 |
| Luke Willis Thompson: <i>Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam</i> (2012) | 154 |
| Conclusion | 156 |
| Chapter 5 – Conclusion | 157 |
| List of Images | 163 |
| Bibliography | 171 |
| Appendices | 177 |
| Links to written texts and publications about my art practice during the PhD candidature | 177 |
| Images of the Exhibition <i>If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?</i> (2019) | 178 |
| Images of the art installation <i>Not to be sold separately</i> (2019) | 183 |
| Images of the art installation <i>if you build it, they will come</i> (2018) | 187 |

Preface

Factory worker by day, Musician after hours;
Work by day, Art by night

My Mother's Father, My Grandfather
Sione (ume) Kafoa – Fisherman/Factory worker – Musician

Kiwi Bacon and Carlton Party Hire

Before I enrolled into art school after college, I decided to work for a year at Carlton Party Hire washing dishes. At the time, Carlton Party Hire used to operate in Kingsland at the 317 New North Road site. I found out later that my grandfather had also worked at this location, and that the building had previously been occupied by Kiwi Bacon in the 1960s through to the 1980s. I couldn't help but think about my grandfather once working at this factory while I was there; the building still had remnants from the kiwi bacon factory. Throughout the building there were ceiling rails (for pig carcasses I presume) leading into what used to be walk-in freezers which Carlton Party Hire used as storage for plates and cutlery. I'd imagine my grandfather working in these places; clocking in to do these monotonous activities then clocking out, similar to my activities as a dish washer.

This is a reference to the historical context of a place being significant in regards to my art practice, dealing with locations and its occupiers from the past and present. It can also refer to the politics or progression of Pacific Labour where a 3rd generation are still working in the same environment as their grandparents worked in.

My grandfather Sione Kafoa was a fisherman and musician in Tonga, he migrated here to Aotearoa in 1977. He worked at the Chesdale factory in Ellerslie before working at Kiwi Bacon. I've never pictured him as a factory worker. I've always experienced him in his informal state: a man who always wore an aloha shirt with long pants and jandels, sometimes often lugging around his guitar case. A factory worker by day and my grandfather and musician after working hours.

My mother would recall, when they lived in Grey Lynn, when my grandfather got his pay, he would use his factory worker's discount to purchase a bag of sausages, ham and pork from Kiwi Bacon. They would have just enough for a taxi ride home after their grocery shopping, but sometimes they would use their taxi fare and get a bag of potatoes and walk home carrying the groceries. How the workers' privileges in their workplace benefited the family.

My grandfather was a quiet person. I used to roll up his Port Royal cigarettes for him whenever I visited. He's the reason I don't smoke. I found it contradictory when he would light up his cigarette and advise me to never smoke when I grow up. I guess it worked. Around the age of ten, my parents made me spend my school holidays with Sione in Avondale. Even though I didn't want to at the time, now I appreciate my parents' intentions to be maheni (familiar) with my grandfather while he was still alive.

My grandfather's house had no television, we listened to a Tongan radio station a lot which broadcast current affairs and music. We would play cards while listening to the radio. He was a Catholic man. I'd often sleep on the living room floor where the catholic shrine was; a small statue of Jesus and Mary made out of porcelain surrounded by other catholic items. It freaked me out at night whenever I went to sleep. With the amount of time I spent with my grandfather you'd think we'd have talked to each other a lot, but it was the complete opposite. I never talked much to my grandfather; he did all the talking. We also sat together for long periods without saying anything. I was more like an observer; me watching him while he was at work in the garden or making music. I've never heard my grandfather speak English; it was always Tongan or a transliteration of the English word into Tongan.

In a Pacific framework, talanoa is generally described as a face-to-face exchange of words. Between my grandfather and me, talanoa was conducted in a learning-through-seeing capacity. Even though nothing was said on my part, my role in this exchange was not simply observational. This will be further described as fanongo talanoa (listening or hearing) in Chapter 1. From this perspective, throughout the projects in this PhD thesis, talanoa is often used to strengthen relationships through just being present and observational. As I've referred to it earlier as maheni, I do the same to strengthen my relationship with my grandfather. I discuss this further in Chapter 1 on the different approaches to talanoa that is practiced during the course of this practice-led thesis project.

Musician Funga'onetaka

Halafaka'ete is a song composed by Funga'onetaka:

Halafaka'ete: Verse 1

Maama e la'a hulungia 'a e moto
Light of the sun shining on the bud

'Aitoli e ofa ne tapu ke to'o
Cuddle the love that forbidden to be taken

‘A sietē manatu mo e ‘unaloto
My memory and longing

Halafaka‘ete ‘oka mahina hopo
To the tiptoe path when the moon rising

I remember, he smelt of Port Royal Tobacco. I remember his wide fingers from working as a fisherman in Navutoka, Tongatapu, or here in the factories. I watched him play the guitar with his broad fingers. He pressed to make the notes, he pushed the strings up onto the neck so he could hold them in place with one finger. I thought they would get in the way but he played the guitar with ease. When he played, he disappeared into the music and I’d disappear with him while listening and watching.

Sione played in a Tongan string band called Funga‘onetaka, formed in the 1950s in the Tongatapu village of Navutoka along with family members. As a kid my mother would tell me stories of my grandfather’s band and how they were popular in their time. The band played songs of love, and often played songs composed by other composers for the purpose of Funga‘onetaka to perform them. Every time they walked into a hall everyone stopped playing and let *them* play. There were different groups of kava players each around their kumete (kava bowl), each placed around the hall in relation to their village or kalapu (club).

Halafaka‘ete: Verse 2

Kehenga ā e palanite tu‘u he ‘atā
Comparing the planets of celestial sphere

‘Ene longovuka talanoa lata
Talking gracefully

Ki ha fo‘i piliote he kilisitala
For a dot in the ocean

Ko e milipa ‘oku laulotaha
A millibar that is unique

He was obliged to work hard and be an after-hours artist, like pō talanoa, the night school, discussed in Chapter 1; the necessity to have meetings after work which provokes another kind of lifestyle. This resulted in a freedom to express oneself without knowing, not thinking about work. His career as a musician was not high on an agenda, but being creative was, and in a village context this was a social endeavour.

As a kid, I'd often tag along with him to his gigs. It was not your usual typical gig where the band is playing on the stage with the audience watching. It's customarily around a kumete where the kava drinkers are the audience and the band is amongst the kava drinkers, an inclusive experience.

After he passed and I stopped visiting him I became aware of the significance of the visits. He passed while I was in my second year at high school.

Halafaka'ete: Verse 3

Tafitonga pea fakalau e 'aho
Clear sky and the dawn break

Pea teki si'i manusiu 'a'alo
Eagerly ready are the birds

Siulolovao he funga Niutao
They seeking over the Niutao area

'O tu'ula 'i he Fangatukulolo
And landed on the Fangatukulolo

My Ongo Mātu'a

They were two different people at home compared to how they were in their workplace. It was a common thing I'd observe with my family: my parents, uncles and aunties coming home fatigued from working long hours at their jobs and then having a different energy at home.

My father worked at fletcher fisheries. This time I got to see him on both spectrums; him being at home and him working in the factories. We couldn't afford day care so my brother and I were shared in between jobs with our parents. My father worked during the day and my mother worked in the evenings and we would be exchanged on the road while one went to work and the other on their way home after work. Sometimes we would go to work with my father, this was our introduction into factory work. I remember his boss let us work with him, the boss was a Yugoslavian migrant. On my father's Tongan passport, his occupation states that he is a plantation worker.

My mother worked as a Registered Nurse at St Mary's Hospice and later at Jervois hospital. These were different working dynamics to my father's job, but there were other issues around being a Pacific female head nurse in a retirement hospital full of Pālangis in the late 1980s early 1990s. She mentioned the racist references some patients would call her at work; the patients would request for another nurse because of the colour of her skin. On my mother's passport, her occupation states that she is a nurse.

Tilbury Place: Avondale, Tonga and Land Ownership

My grandfather Sione (ume) Kafoa named his land in Tonga after the street he lived on in Avondale, Tilbury Place. The ownership of this *fonua* (land) has recently come under question. In Tonga, women are unable to own *fonua*. My mother is the eldest out of three female siblings. To bypass these laws my mother signed my grandfather's *fonua* under my name, as I am the eldest male grandchild. Recently a distant male relative from my grandfather's side of the family has tried to lay claim to this *fonua*, which has caused a legal battle under Tongan law between families. We are left in limbo awaiting a decision or resolution.

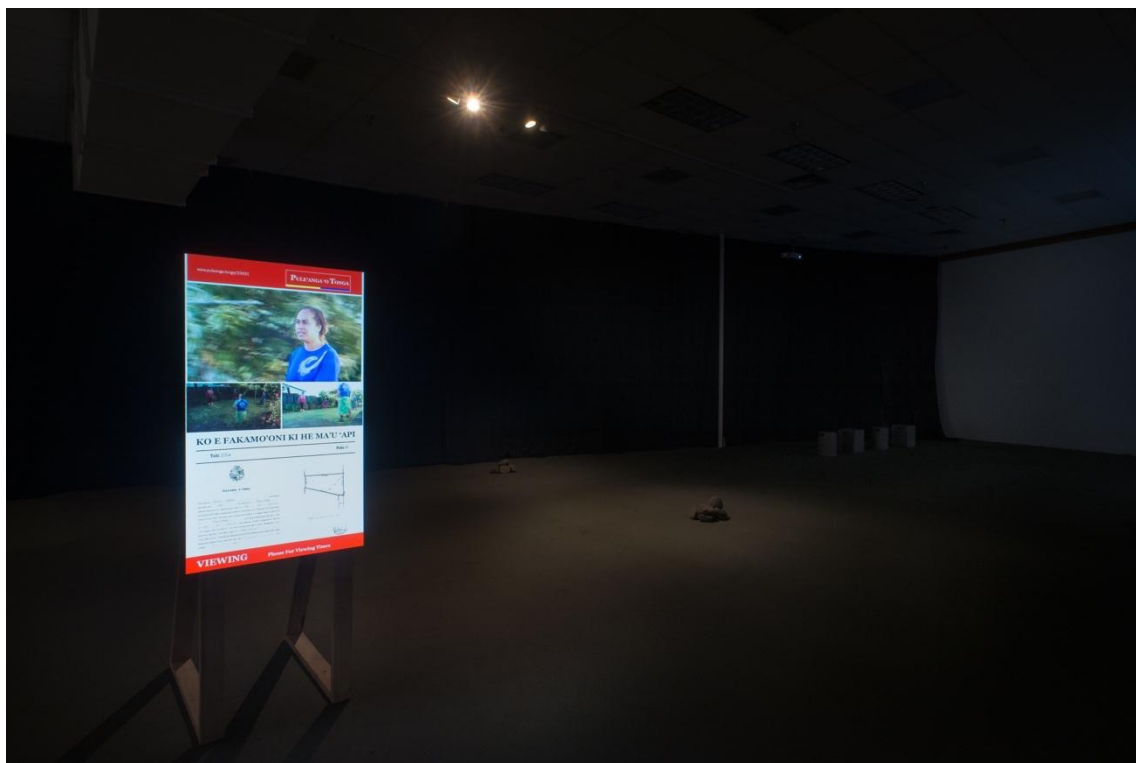


Figure 1. Vea, J. (2017). *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina*. [Video Installation]. 2017 Honolulu Biennial, Honolulu, Hawaii. Image credit: Honolulu Biennial.

she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina (2017)

The artwork *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* (2017) is based on a game from my childhood called '*Eggs in a Basket*' which involves stealing as many rocks/balls/eggs as possible from opponents within the allocated time frame. I apply this concept of competing for ownership within the more sinister context of my mother's battle to retain her home. The performers in the video work are my first cousins; my mother's younger sisters' kids. The eldest of them all is female, and like my mother's situation, she would contest her father's land with her younger brother. Because of being the eldest boy, under the current law in Tonga, he would inherit their father's land. The setting of the video artwork is situated at my mother's property she owns in Maungarei, Mt Wellington, Aotearoa.



Figure 2. (2017). *Filming of the artwork she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, Fonua family. Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.*

In *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina*, I used *Halafaka'ete* composed by my grandfather's band Funga'onetaka. When in post editing, I asked my mother (my grandfather Sione Kafoa's eldest child) to choose a song that would be appropriate to play with this particular work, and she chose *Halafaka'ete*.



KO E FAKAMO'ONI KI HE MA'U 'API

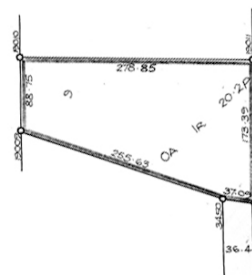
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PULE'ANGA 'O TONGA.

Kuo atu kia Sione Katoa ke ne ma'u
ko hono 'api kolo 'a ia 'oku tu'u 'i Navutoka
pea ko hono lahi 'o e 'api ko ia ko e 'eka 'e Oa 'i 20.2 p
si'i hifo pe lahi hake 'o hange ko ia 'oku ha 'i he mape 'a ia 'oku tu'u 'i he Tohi Faka-
mo'oni ni pea kuo vali lanu mata, pea ko hono kotoa 'o e konga fonua ni 'oku tu'u
'i Navutoka pea 'oku fe'unga hono lahi mo e 'eka
'e Oa 'i 20.2 p lahi hake pe si'i hifo 'o hange ko ia 'oku ha
'i he mape 'i halo 'o e tohi ni. Ka e fu'u mahino lelei ange 'i hano fakamatala 'o ha-
nge ko ia 'oku tu'u 'i he 'ulu'i mape 'o Navutoka
'i he 'Ofisi Savea. Koe'uhi ke fakamo'oni ki he Tohi Fakamo'oni ni kuon tohi hoku
hingoa pea fokotu'u ki ai 'eku Sila 'i he 'aho houngafulemafa (14) 'o e
mahina Navema 1978



Scale: one chain to an inch.



VIEWING

Phone For Viewing Times

Figure 3. Vea, J. (2017). she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, still image. [Video].

Halafaka‘ete: Verse 4

Kolonia e ‘otumo‘unga e afe
Colony of thousand mountains

Siueli ‘oku fihi ‘i he kolope
A jewel that entering in the Globe

Neongo ‘ene fotu laumalie
Even it appears from a long distance

Kei ‘asini ‘i he maka māpele
But still clear as a marble rock

Honolulu Biennial, Ma‘o Organic Farms

The making of *she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina* was influenced by my two-week residency in Hawaii. This artwork was later shown in the Honolulu Biennial. Hawaiian land values and rights are different from Tongan land laws in that women can inherit land. In this context I was drawn to the Hawaiian concept of *Aloha ‘Āina* (love of the land) which, in the native Hawaiian language, refers to a way of life based on interrelationships between thought, cosmology and culture. Its ecological and cultural alignments are established from a sense of being connected to all living things. This can be interpreted as all living things treated equally (Silva 2004:18).



Figure 4. (2016). *Ma'o Organic Farms visit*. Waianae, Hawaii.

During that two-week residency visit, Ngahiraka Mason, curatorial director of the 2017 Honolulu Biennial, had taken me to an organic farm called Ma'o farms based in the Waianae area in Hawaii Oahu. Ngahiraka introduced Cheryse Sana and Kamuela Enos who are co-managing the farm. They showed me around the plantation and talked about how they mainly work with kids who have just left high school and heading for college. A non-profit organisation, Ma'o farms explore challenges for youth and community through traditional Hawaiian agriculture.



Figure 5. (2016) *Ma'o Organic Farms visit*. Waianae, Hawaii.

In the farm, we walked past a large pile of rocks retrieved from the land. The way the rocks were organised looked like the formation of rocks that surround a house in Tonga. The pile of rocks triggered a story in me about my mother's situation owning *fonua* in Tonga and this gave rise to the use of the childhood game called 'Eggs in a Basket' for *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina.*



Figure 6. (2016) *Ma 'o Organic Farms visit: Pile of rocks collected from the field. Waianae, Hawaii.*

Conclusion – after hours

This Preface is designed as a starting point for the exegesis; a place to introduce the main personal and driving motivation for the artworks contextualised in this overall practice-led PhD thesis. The Preface stands in for an introduction because I prefer the idea of something said or talked about before the main conversation, like a foreword. This highlights the importance of talanoa before anything else. For this reason, I have started storytelling about aspects of my personal history; my parents and my grandparents; our history of work, life and home-life as it has played out in Aotearoa. This point will be picked up again in Talanoa Usu 2, where I discuss 'Tukufakaholo', influenced by the book *The Past Before Us: Mo'okū'auhau as Methodology*. In this particular interlude, I deliberate on the Tongan concept of Tukufakaholo and the Hawaiian methodology of Mo'okū'auhau, looking into a deeper Indigenous understanding of genealogical knowledge, being and lived experiences in a Pacific context. Talanoa Usu are intervals slotted in between the chapters to give an insight into how talanoa is embodied through a practical framework in each art project.

This history involves an experience of the Pacific diaspora. Here, I have described my family's history as Tongan and their journey to Auckland, but also my experience visiting Hawaii and contrasts between Tongan and Hawaiian law, provoking important issues of land ownership, something that gives our people a sense of place and belonging. Mixed with these stories is the naming of my grandfather's land in Tonga as Tilbury, a place-name borrowed from Avondale, Aotearoa, that was in turn borrowed from the borough of Essex in England where Tilbury contains a 16th century fort and ancient cross-river ferry. These details about Tilbury are not important to the current project but are nevertheless part of a distant entanglement that is, in turn, part of a colonial unfolding and diasporic experience.

I'm reminded of this in the talanoa above, commenting on how my name, John, is a translation of Sione in Tongan, and how my grandfather never used the name John when naming me, calling me and conversing with me. Supposedly my mother named me after my grandfather, but the English version. I guess at the time it was an attempt on my mother's behalf to adapt a pālangi name living in the time we were living in New Zealand.

As described above, my grandfather Sione Kafoa was a fisherman and musician in Tonga who migrated here to Aotearoa in 1977. He was obliged to work hard and be an after-hours artist. I have contextualised this dynamic of family life, long work hours and a drive for creativity through the term pō talanoa; the necessity to have meetings after work which provokes another kind of lifestyle.

Through the anecdotes of my own and my family's experiences, as an inside or emic perspective (discussed at length in Chapter 2), I set the tone and direction of my art practice and its approach to issues of labour. The project becomes a discussion about the complexities of life and labour in the Pacific diaspora. How Pacific peoples adapt to relocation and issues of labour and laws around working, and how these play a part in our traditions, our living and family dynamics.

Throughout my artworks, in different ways, I reflect and contextualise concerns of the workspace and its historical significance for the Pacific diaspora. Anecdotes and insider experiences emerge like check-points, sometimes explicit but often implicit in my art practice. Some have been touched on in this Preface: a workplace and its workers from the past and present (as is the case with my grandfather and me working in the same place but in a different time) and the benefits of the factory workers often exploited from the wages they are paid (as with my grandfather's discounted products from the Kiwi Bacon factory). All these are related to racial tensions in the workplace (as with my mother's experiences of racism as a Nurse). They are conflicts of practicing our culture during working hours when we are only able to be Tongan after hours. As said, this is a politics or progression of Pacific Labour where a 3rd generation are still working in the same environment as their grandparents.

Halafaka‘ete: Verse 5

Ha‘u ke ta toli huni tangitangi
Come we’ll pick huni tangitangi

‘O e funga ofovaka pea mo Nakapasi
Of the funga ofovaka and Nakapasi

Mo ta teunga ki he veivosaki
To wear to the exchange

‘Oka nunu pea tava ‘a Pangai
When Pangai is shimmering and ready

The next chapter introduces talanoa which forms a key research methodology. I will discuss talanoa as a common Indigenous practice amongst Pacific cultures. Through a literature review, I examine the main approaches to talanoa. In doing so, I will highlight specific approaches or interest in talanoa as embodied in this practice-led PhD project.

Chapter 1 Talanoa

Introducing Talanoa

Prior to any academic explanation of talanoa, my early understanding of this term as a kid living in Herne Bay, Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), was an experience through fanongo talanoa (listening or hearing) with family conversations. As a young fella I would sit in the fale paito (kitchen) around the dining table playing with wooden toys and blocks while listening to talanoa being conducted by my ongo mātu‘a (parents) and family members. It was like a history lesson based on a manatu melie (sweet memories). I would increase my understanding of my ongo mātu‘a through the memories they talked about, and built a profile or picture of connections between my ongo mātu‘a, family, Tonga and Aotearoa. I didn’t get to participate, as such, but understood how talanoa was practiced through hearing recollections. Things I didn’t appreciate about their relationship with me became clearer through their relationship with others. Listening to my Fa‘e (mother) or Tamai (father) talanoa with family members, I gained an extension or different perspective of my ongo mātu‘a and wider family, and an extension of myself. You don’t talk about yourself, but others talk about you in a different light, or through another family member. You realise what people are capable of; their courage and fortitude. In these ways, talanoa is a lived experience that furthers an understanding of relationships of people across space and time.¹ In this respect, I’ve used the term ‘medium’ in the spiritual sense, as a person being able to communicate with both the dead and the living, which I elaborate on in Chapter 3 titled ‘Pasifika Edgewalkers’ as a state of limbo. In this way, talanoa would become a research method that reflects the lived realities of my family participants “likened to narrative interviews” (Fa’avae *et al*, 2016:138) but extended across a temporality: a kind of time machine. And this might be similar to Tecun’s (Daniel Hernandez) term ‘continuum’, meaning that our story dialogue is relational; it moves across generations, through ancestors, past and present (Tecun 2018:156).

¹ The Sāmoan concept of vā explores space between things or people. I have made a conscious decision not to reference vā because I did not grow up with the concept and there is a lot of literature written about it already. I decided instead to concentrate on the practice of talanoa (see Wendt, 1996).

Tecun references Smith and Wilson with respect to re-positioning ourselves in order to prioritise our families and communities past and present which is an ethic underscoring in my art practice in this thesis:

Having respect for those before us is part of this mediation, it positions us as writers with our Indigenous identities where we are today, and in turn we re-position ourselves in order to chart a direction for those to come after us. This is a genealogical ethic that is also part of being relationally mindful. We put our ancestors and communities at the centre within this ontology, rather than research goals in dominant research paradigms. (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008, cited by Tecun 2018:156)

Pacific Academic Literature on Talanoa

Talanoa is a common practice which most Pacific cultures are built on. Talanoa can be interpreted as conversing with another intimately. Ideas of exchanging, gathering, sharing, and dissemination are all aspects used in the practice of Talanoa (Vea 2015:6; Vea, Braddock 2019).

There are numerous texts on talanoa written by Pacific academics which I refer to in support of my approach as to how talanoa is used in my practice-led PhD. I will refer to these texts in more detail in this chapter following this short summary. I was first introduced to academic writing on talanoa by Timote Vaoleti, developing a Pacific research methodology in education. Vaoleti says, talanoa research methodology is a personal encounter where people story their issues (2006:21). David Fa'avae looks at the difficulties and practical dilemmas of talanoa in his own research practice (2016:138). Tecun, 'Inoke Hafoka, Lavinia 'Ulu'ave and Moana 'Ulu'ave-Hafoka emphasise the importance of "story dialogue known as Talanoa" in Pacific research, where they call Talanoa a "relationally mindful critical oratory" (Tecun *et al* 2018:156). Sitiveni Halapua describes talanoa as storytelling through transparency (2013:2). Furthermore, talanoa is defined by Trisia Farrelly and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba as "informal open-ended interviews" (2014:321). Mere Kēpa and Linitā Manu'atu calls it, "a critical dialogue" emerging from Pō Talanoa which enriches Tongan language and culture (2006:11,12). I relate talanoa to pedagogy where Manulani Meyer argues the importance of Indigenous education as "something we must define in relation to our own understanding of ourselves, our past, and our potential" (2001:146). With reference to the practices of talanoa, these texts written by Pacific, Māori and Mayan academics have a common goal: they all argue why Pacific led research and systems for Pacific people are important to allow a more "mo'oni" (real, authentic) study compared to Western approaches.

Compared to other research methods, from a personal and Tongan perspective, Timote Vaioleti argues talanoa as an appropriate approach to researching Pacific communities in Aotearoa. Talanoa research methodology is a personal encounter where people story their issues (Vaioleti 2006:21). Vaioleti also argues that the “majority of the thinking and concepts discussed have similarities and common implications for most other Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand” (2006:21). From this perspective, talanoa as a lived research experience has relevance beyond Tongan communities for wider Pacific peoples. Vaioleti also points to the importance of “what constitutes ‘normality’ in relation to research approaches” (2006:21).

David Fa’avae critiques talanoa from the researcher and personal perspective as a Tongan male, looking at the difficulties and practical dilemmas of talanoa in his own research practice (2016:138). He highlights the importance of lived realities of participants in differences to some Western research methods and how we must learn from our difficulties encountered (2016:138). This will become an important part of the way this exegesis describes and narrates problems and complexities encountered in my lived experience research and performance-based art practice that engages with participants and communities. For example, I will discuss problems encountered in the artwork *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016) as I negotiated my Tongan identity in relation to Tangata Whenua, outlined later in this chapter.

As said, Tecun, ‘Inoke Hafoka, Lavinia ‘Ulu‘ave and Moana ‘Ulu‘ave-Hafoka emphasise the importance of “story dialogue known as Talanoa” in Pacific research. They call talanoa “relationally mindful critical oratory” recalling again, as mentioned above, the significance of oral research methods and relational dialogue across generations (Tecun *et al* 2018:156).

They emphasise “an open or informal discussion” that has implications for more formal academic research. In this respect the practice-led creative arts methodologies and content of this thesis embody talanoa as another way of challenging so-called formal ‘academic’ methods and protocols. Furthermore, Tecun *et al* refer to Indigenous Oceanic thought as embodying Mana, Tapu and Noa. In this context, I will further discuss the notion of Noa as equilibrium or balance and the problems I encountered as a facilitator or co-ordinator of participatory artworks. How does what Tecun *et al* call “centring Moana (Oceanic) epistemologies” operate in the production of these artworks? My intention is to create a shared and open collaboration, but the role of facilitator can become overly directive. How does facilitation and research sit alongside Moana-centered talanoa ways of being? From this perspective, Sitiveni Halapua describes talanoa as storytelling without concealment. He discusses the importance of Noa in the role of facilitation as a quality that seeks to build relationships between stories and, to some degree, strips away hierarchies, allowing storytellers to share in some form of equilibrium (2013:2).

This might also relate to storytelling that is more than casual conversation, or what Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba refer to as “informal open-ended interviews” (2014:321). In sharing there will also be emotional repercussions involved. It is inevitable during the exchanges, as lived experiences come with lived emotions of those experiences. Perhaps linked to the importance of Noa in the role of facilitation, Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba place emphasis on empathy, without which talanoa loses its soul and we become detached:

However, talanoa is often treated as synonymous with ‘informal open-ended interviews’ and tends to gloss over the deep empathic understanding required in such exchanges. Highlighting the connection between talanoa and empathy is vital in ensuring that development practitioners and researchers are implicitly aware of the political dimensions, cultural appropriacy and socio-ecological impact of their research methods. (2014:319)

Kepa and Manu‘atu draw upon Pō Ako (night school) as an inclusive family orientated way of learning in relation to a community-based project concerning Tongan students at a New Zealand high school (2006:11). Official curriculum is extended and re-created alongside students, tutors and parents. A critical dialogue emerges called Pō Talanoa which enriches Tongan language and culture (Kepa & Manu‘atu 2006:11,12). Here, Pō Ako reflects Tongan ‘grassroots’ work that, again, relates to the concept of relationality and orally described above by Tecun *et al.*

Like Kepa and Manu‘atu’s Pō Ako, Manulani Meyer stresses the importance of Indigenous education (through a Hawaiian context) as “something we must define in relation to our own understanding of ourselves, our past, and our potential”, and which is a “more organic, more real, more tied to place” approach to pedagogy for our own Pacific community (Meyer 2001:146).

Later in this chapter, I will relate Pō Ako and Pō Talanoa to night conversation or after-hours performance which, in turn, reflects my experience in working night shift factory work that is also referenced in artworks such as *you kids should only experience this for a moment - don't be here for life like me* (2018) and *Caution Cleaner* (2014).

My Interpretation of Talanoa

My interpretation of talanoa has become diluted as a result of my New Zealand education. Talanoa started to fade away from an experience, to being interpreted as merely a conversation. In this context, Fa'avae discusses the conflicts of western understandings of research learned through education, challenging Pacific understandings of knowing and doing taught to you by your first teachers, your parents (Fa'avae *et al*, 2016:139). This touches on the ideas of Hawaiian epistemology discussed by Manulani Meyer and differences between knowing and doing discussed in Chapter 3 'Limbo/Pasifika Edgewalkers' and lived research experience through Pacific collectives (The Kohala Center, 2009). From these perspectives, I began to re-think my cultural position in relation to the dynamics of talanoa when I first introduced talanoa into my art thinking when writing my research proposal for the Postgraduate Diploma course (PG Dip) in art & design at AUT. The artist Luke Willis-Thompson, during a 15-minute break at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (we were working as gallery docents), helped me write an art proposal. He asked, "what's conversation, or gathering of information, in your language?" I replied, talanoa, but that it's more than conversation. It's a physical experience that incorporates atmosphere and vulnerability that depends on relations with others; a capacity to let go of oneself, depending on the duration of the conversation. A slow trust emerges and eventually you start to have a less filtered talanoa. That is what I mean by my experience of talanoa outside of so-called academic theory and beyond any assumptions about 'conversation'. My research proposal at the time emphasised talanoa as a research method: a way of making art from the information gathered. As well as this, like Fa'avae's approach, I attempt to outline "practical dilemmas sometimes experienced by researchers attempting to use" talanoa (Fa'avae *et al*, 2016:138). Like Fa'avae's use of the term 'talanoa'i 'a e talanoa', *doing* talanoa through art practice highlights difficulties in gathering stories (2016:139). As Fa'avae states, "I still stumbled through 'doing' talanoa" (2016:139). Like Fa'avae, my first attempt at talanoa in my PG Dip went through a hesitant phase due to defining talanoa as a research method rather than a way of being. I mixed what I called a journalistic approach, extracting information from subjects with more talanoa orientated conversations. By contrast, the 'doing' aspect encourages a less invasive and more fluid exchange with more shared live experiences.

In summary, Tecun *et al* position talanoa as an Indigenous concept of relationally mindful critical oratory (2018:156). In relation to my thesis, talanoa is a method that has derived from a personal pedagogical upbringing through a Tongan perspective. As I acknowledge my upbringing as a Tongan educated in Aotearoa, I also recognize my 'first teachers', families, communities, and relations have framed my lens of storytelling and relationality to place and people (Tecun *et al.*, 2018:156).

From this perspective, I develop a performance art practice that includes collaboration and co-operation through Pacific collectives that extends into community relationships. Sharing and exchanging our collective memories, experiences, and skills through talanoa we develop a Pacific Indigenous approach to relationality. I will further discuss this in Chapter 3 Limbo and Pasifika Edgewalker, in a way of extending what academics call research methodology.

A key point that emerges from this reflection on my early experiences about talanoa is a fanongo talanoa of memories; hearing flashbacks that enabled a piecing together or building connections with Tonga and a bridging toward life in Aotearoa. This, in turn, built pictures about others and myself in relation. It was a physical experience that incorporated atmosphere and vulnerability where family members “share their stories, thoughts and feelings” (Fa’avae *et al*, 2016:138, referencing Vaioleti, 2006). It involved a capacity to let go of oneself, sometimes in long durations as slow trust emerges.

In Claire Bishop’s writing on ‘Delegated Performances: Outsourcing Authenticity’ from her book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, she explains the selection process of performers or actors that are being employed by artists for their artworks. The artists don not just employ any random performers, they employ people connected to a certain type of social group, or a profession, which highlights a political agenda to their works. In my case I co-operate with people that reflect a certain type of social group. Bishop mentions, in passing, the term ‘identitarian politics’ (2012:220) in regard to political arguments, which focus their identity in a social context. Bishop also refers to the performers deployed by the artists, as “These bodies are a metonymic shorthand for politicised identities” (2012:222). The idea of using a person, who is from a particular society, to symbolically reflect on a social political issue is important to how co-operatives and talanoa function.

Lived Research Experience

The following is a short summary of what I call talanoa encounters that stem from ‘lived research experience’ rather than research methods, in the context of ‘academic’ research. Here, a practice-led research paradigm linked with talanoa from a Pacific perspective drives such a transformation. This is linked to what Tecun *et al* describe as a “closeness rather than distance within an assumed objectivity that is common place in dominant Western research practices” (Tecun 2018:158).

Fa‘avae talks about Vaoleti’s (2013) suggestion of at least eight strategies of talanoa which can be applied in the context of research:

talanoa vave (quick and surface verbal exchange between two or more people); talanoa faikava (focused talanoa by males who share similar interests while drinking kava [traditional soporific beverage from crushed kava root]); talanoa usu (deep and more intimate talanoa which is mälle and mäfana and involves humour); talanoa tevolo (spiritual talanoa which involves sharing about supernatural visitations, dreams or visions of people who have passed);² talanoa faka‘eke‘eke (closest to a modern interview and involves verbal searching and more probing questions); pō talanoa (talking in everyday matters such as politics, church matters, children, television); talanoa‘i (talking which involves high-level analysis, synthesis and evaluation); and tālanga (similar to a debate or constructive argument about issues that require attention). (Fa‘avae 2016:143)

I hover between aspects of these forms of talanoa, but I don’t practice or ‘do’ any of them in a singular way. This exegesis is a way of discovering how my art practice applies talanoa, or extends the meanings and possibilities of talanoa in art practice, and in an interface with contemporary diasporic Pacific peoples.

My approach with talanoa is conducted through an ethical way, being relationally mindful of the individual or community I talanoa with. I consider all aspects of relationships when in talanoa with an individual or a collective: the connection to a place, the cultural awareness, the relation to the community and sometimes the relation to an object and movements.

² ‘Talanoa tevolo’ comes from a transliteration of ‘devil/diabolic’ a different term and interpretation that moves away from a Christian colonial deficit term is ‘talanoa fakafa‘ahikehe’ for spirits/spiritual talanoa.

Pō Talanoa

There are possibly 2 types of talanoa from Vaioleti's suggestions that may apply to my practice-led PhD project. The first is "Pō Talanoa (talking in everyday matters such as politics, church matters, children, television)". This is distinct from talanoa faka'eke'eke which is not an approach I usually practice as my way of talanoa lets the participants dictate the exchange. The second is "talanoa usu (deep and more intimate talanoa which is mālie and māfana and involves humour)" (Fa'avae 2016:143). An extension of talanoa usu can also mean to keep the talanoa continuously going. I have used it as intervals between chapters to keep the reading of this exegesis mālie and māfana. The segments are slotted in between the chapters to give an insight into how talanoa is embodied through a practical framework in each art project. Pō Talanoa usually leads to an idea of an art project. They sometimes stem from spontaneous everyday conversation, usually beginning with just my own interest to fanongo and talanoa with family, friends or people who are local to the area. The latter is an approach often used to make an etic (outsider) connection on an understanding of a topic, community or place from an emic (insider) perspective. In most of my art projects there is some form of Pō Talanoa being practiced in the initial stages of the project, in particular on two occasions in *One kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016) and the Honolulu Biennale research residency in the same year.



Figure 7. (2016). Kaitiaki Taini Drummond with Valasi Leota-Seiuli, Jimmy Wulf and Newman Tumata. Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.

In both projects I befriended two local individuals who had guided me in offering an emic perspective which led to how I would navigate my art practice ethically in relation to myself, place and subject. In this regard, *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016) will be discussed further in the next chapter, Talanoa Usu 1, where I will discuss how Taini Drummond and I had a talanoa at the wharehau in the ‘Emilia Maud Nixon Garden of Memories’ where she is the Kaitiaki (guardian). This particular project would set the template for the way I approach future projects ethically from an etic perspective. As a result of our Pō Talanoa, Drummond shifted from being an individual who shared her lived experiences with me, to being a form of Kaitiaki to myself and the art project. As Tecun *et al* suggest, “Talanoa is not static and should be carried out with an understanding that local knowledge systems are perpetually negotiated as living cultures that are continually evolving” (2018:158). In this sense an individual can shift from sitting outside the art project to having an integral role, and a less directive approach, leaning more towards a fluid cooperation.



Figure 8. (2016). *Imaikalani Kalahele*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Another occasion where Pō Talanoa was utilised was during a 2016 research residency in Hawaii with activist, poet and artist Imaikalani Kalahale. The Vietnam veteran, Imaikalani invited me to ‘talk story’, a Hawaiian term that means ‘to talk informally’ or ‘catching up’ (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:16), about the history and collective of memories from his experiences living in Honolulu. Like Kaitiaki Drummond, Imaikalani guided me into how to approach my art practice in response to his ‘talk story’ or talanoa about Honolulu, the place he resides in. I elaborate on this project in Talanoa Usu 2.

For these projects, my role as facilitator (sometimes presumed as etic) has not so much the purpose to retrieve information but to fanongo and make a connection. In both occasions it wasn’t just what Taini Drummond and Imaikalani Kalahale shared with me but it was what they chose to share the longer the talanoa progressed. In saying that, talanoa is not an instant cooperation and naturally there are teething issues in regards to when strangers meet. Eventually the longer the talanoa goes the barriers start to come down and the participants (emic) dictate the talanoa while the facilitator (me, etic) goes with the flow. In this process it’s a given that there can be tangents from any ‘topic’ discussed. These tangents extend to talanoa shifting into other places, starting from one area and continuing into another. This can also apply to the activities of the participants playing a role in the exchanges. I elaborate on these talanoa tangents in Talanoa Usu 2, discussing how talanoa can start in one place and extend into, for example, a fai kava (kava session).

My aim is to embody lived research experiences in an installation and performance art practice so that this becomes a ‘street smart’ interpretation of what talanoa might mean.

Pō Talanoa at night, a different time zone, or afterhours performance

Kepa and Manu‘atu discuss talanoa from a collective pedagogical perspective with an emphasis on cooperation through a Tongan education initiative called Pō ako (night school), to improve Tongan secondary students' understanding of education in Aotearoa during the year 2000. Kepa and Manu‘atu define talanoa or Pō talanoa (night conversation) as a “curious dialogue in the night” as a way of sharing critical dialogical relationships between the Tongan students, the tutors of Po ako, the parents, and the teaching staff of the school where the initiative is being conducted (Kepa and Manu‘atu 2006:16).

Kepa and Manu‘atu describe Pō talanoa as something that provides an alternative to the standard classroom context as well as operating during the night (2006:16). This is a way of engaging in what they call relational practice which is a key consideration in the presence of community as an Indigenous notion of partnership (Kepa and Manu‘atu 2006:15). This introduces a different kind of time management because mostly nobody is working at night. It gives the participants (tutors, parents and students) the opportunity to discuss education but in a different time zone. In order for Māori and Tongan teachers to be ‘active participants’, deploying Pō Ako as a “richer and curious way of practice”, Kepa and Manu‘atu state that they “had to start learning from the students and their parents, and we had to continue to learn from each other” (2006:14).



Figure 9. Vea, J. (2015). *Caution Cleaner*. [Video Projection]. Solo Exhibition: Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker, Hawkes Bay MTG Forecourt, Napier, New Zealand.

This is interesting because it is often the case that the Pacific community come together and have their meetings in the late afternoon or night when not at work in the strict institutional sense. This applies to family meetings or musical rehearsals and choir practice and so on. It is also my personal experience and the experience of many Pacific peoples to work at night in nightshift. From this perspective, part of my solo exhibition titled 'Talanoa, Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker' (2015) at Hawkes Bay MTG included a video installation titled *Caution Cleaner* (2014) that operated after hours at night on the exterior forecourt at the main entrance of the gallery. The projected video, displayed on the forecourt floor, depicts a series of cleaners scrubbing the concrete floor in a kneeling position. At the end of the video, one of the cleaners puts a caution sign 'wet floor' in the middle of the scrubbed area. Initially this work was displayed outside after hours in protest of the gallery's \$10 entry fee, but it also became accessible for people who could only view the exhibition after-hours when they have finished work. There is a large Pacific community in the Hawkes Bay/Hastings area, where most work in the orchards. This relates to how Kepa and Manu'atu describe Pō Ako as something that provides an alternative to the standard institutional contexts when operating during the night (2006:16). In this respect, *Caution Cleaner* at the Hawke's Bay MTG evoked a relational practice with respect to Indigenous and Pacific communities as a form of partnership. Does this say something about the nature of noa as nothingness and the way in which Pō Ako operates during the night? Working at night brings a sense of working in a space with fewer expectations.



Figure 10. Vea, J. (2015). *Caution Cleaner*. [Video Projection]. Solo Exhibition: Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker, Hawkes Bay MTG Forecourt, Napier, New Zealand.

There is considerable irony in this discussion. We have just said that the Pacific community meet after hours in order to discuss things outside the context of institutional work and labour. Yet, it is the predicament of many Pacific Islanders that they need to work at night as a second or third job, or to negotiate work requirements around other family responsibilities. Is this something that the Pacific diaspora need to constantly negotiate? There's a tendency to want to talanoa after hours but there is also sometimes the necessity to work after hours.

In this sense, those 'contradictions' might be part of Tongan, and wider Pacific peoples, negotiating with future possibilities and practices in Aotearoa. As Kepa and Manu'atu write:

Pō Talanoa, then, is an entering by Tongan people into the currents of technocratic/ Palangi consciousness and the personal. The dialogical relationship involves the critical understanding of the historical and current situations and an awareness of future possibilities of practice in education. (2006:16)

In this context we might think about after hours work and the nature of evening and night. Does this relate to collective learning and different kinds of discussion and encouraging trust?

As a Graduate Assistant (GA) during my PhD candidature I would encourage Pacific and Māori undergraduate students to meet every Friday evening in the art school studios to talk about the things they were struggling with in regards to their studies. There is something about talanoa after hours, not being bound to the institutional time where the students and myself feel free to let go. It doesn't feel official, a form of Pō talanoa. This is like my grandfather Sione Kafoa's life as a factory worker by day and musician by night mentioned in the Preface. As Pacific artists we tend to practice after hours, after work or after school. I recollect in high school, we did ako faiva (Tongan practice) for the Polyfest after hours. From this perspective, I hope that *Caution Cleaner* projected at night outside the Hawke's Bay MTG develops a thinking about performance art that happens after hours in public, literally outside art institutional buildings or in other places unrelated to art institutions. And, like Kepa and Manu'atu, perhaps this is a Pō talanoa (night conversation) as a "curious dialogue in the night" as a way of sharing critical dialogical relationships through art.



Figure 11. (2016) *Friday night, after hours talanoa with undergraduate students as a Graduate Assistant mentor. AUT, Auckland, New Zealand.*

So far, this chapter has involved a summary of key issues relating to talanoa. This has included talanoa as a personal encounter where people story their issues (Vaiotele 2006), the difficulties and practical dilemmas of talanoa in research practice (Fa'avae 2016), oral story-telling that is relationally mindful (Tecun *et al* 2018), storytelling with transparency (Halapua 2013), informal open-ended interviews (Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba 2014), talanoa as a pedagogy for Indigenous education (Meyer 2001), and Pō Talanoa as critical dialogue enriching Tongan language and culture (Kēpa and Manu'atu 2006) which I have extended in a discussion about after hours performance art practices. A common goal has been for mo'oni (real, authentic) Pacific research methods.

‘Doing’ Talanoa

Tecun explores talanoa as a practice, it is not “static”, it “requires movement”, it is sometimes “spontaneous” and “should be carried out with an understanding that local knowledge systems are perpetually evolving” (2018:158). As artist and researcher, ‘doing’ talanoa (Fa‘avae *et al*, 2016:139) highlights different approaches and strategies in the practicalities of this Indigenous research method. With this in mind, the rest of this chapter introduces movements and strategies and how they develop throughout this thesis project.

To begin with, I discuss the practical dilemmas in the practice of talanoa in my art projects. These dilemmas involve the following kinds of situations: that I should be cautious as a Tongan going into Māori and Pākehā cultural discussions; that I should not arrive in another country and make *their* cultural problems *my* concerns in my research; the importance of punctuality and responsible community relationships; the importance of face-to-face discussions with local cultural communities and not getting side-lined by local body politics and politicians; the complexities of making artworks in real life market situations that may undermine other people’s (including immigrants) livelihoods; and lastly, difficulties in talking with journalists when they want soundbite information rather than the more drawn out time-consuming forms of talanoa that are sometimes necessary. As noted below, these practical dilemmas are discussed throughout this exegesis in different chapters, but are briefly introduced here.

Following that section on ‘Practical Dilemmas of Talanoa’, the rest of this chapter is divided into different sections that explore in more practical detail some of the overall observations about talanoa made so far in this chapter. Firstly, the importance of the position or perspective of the researcher through notions of emic/etic or insider/outsider. Secondly, I look at the importance in championing our own Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems through our lived experiences and collective memories. This will focus on how talanoa “navigates relationships as a critical relational orality” (Tecun 2018:16) with an emphasis on engaging with collectives, communities and other cultures with myself in relation. And thirdly, I discuss talanoa as transparent storytelling and the role of the facilitator focusing on the importance of the equilibrium or noa in sharing stories with others.

Practical Dilemmas of Talanoa

Despite methodological guidance from the literature about its ideal characteristics, there is very little written about the practicalities of using talanoa as a research method . . . we need to voice these complexities and tensions, rather than ignoring the failures and problems in practice. (Tecun 2018:158; quoted from Fa‘avae *et al*, 2016:147)

A focus of this chapter is to contextualise practical applications of talanoa as a research method to “voice these complexities and tensions” as suggested by Tecun. These complexities and tensions in talanoa are sometimes uncomfortable situations but a learning curve for myself as artist and researcher. As will be discussed later in Talanoa Usu 1, an early case of these dilemmas as a PhD student was in the artwork *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016). A Māori doctoral colleague questioned my involvement and whether I was aware this may look intrusive on my part, as a Tongan male going into a conflicted space between Māori and Pākehā. The Garden of Memories was established by first-generation British occupant, Emilia Maud Nixon in Howick to foster goodwill and understanding between Māori and Pakeha. To this day, there are people from the community who oppose Māori cultural influences in The Garden of Memories which have led to violent activities and conflicts.

My colleague reminded me of the dilemmas of looking inside a cultural situation from the outside and how talanoa as a sharing of cultural perspectives can seem to shift my role as the artist/researcher (etic) ‘giving voice’ (Smith, 2012:189) to someone who is inside (emic) the culture to share their cultural experiences, while unintentionally still leading a project in a directive role. This highlights the importance of the introduction from curator Bruce Phillips and the importance of face-to-face discussion with Kaitiaki of The Garden Memories, Taini Drummond. As mentioned earlier, this first case has become a guide on how to approach upcoming projects with complex cultural positioning and identity. In saying this, talanoa as a research method has become adaptable, spontaneously responding to these dilemmas as they are very different in each circumstance.



Figure 12. (2017). *Sean Connelly and John Vea Artist Talks chaired by Ngahiraka Mason*. The Hub, Honolulu, Hawaii.

The second occasion was in Honolulu, Hawaii, during a research residency. I fell into the trap some artists on research residencies fall into when the politics of the country they are in becomes *their* politics. My artwork endeavoured to focus on and discuss issues to do with Hawaiian labour issues which were not my own lived experience. I wanted to make artwork in response to the Dole Food Company (fruit and vegetable producer) in Hawaii and America's exploitation of their local produce. I discuss this project further in *Talanoa Usu 2* where I get scolded by the assistant curator Ngahiraka Mason in response to my misguided approach, a precaution talanoa.



Figure 13. (2018). *Conversation On Art and Labour with Salome Tanuvasa and John Vea chaired by Ioana Gordon Smith.* Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

A further example of these complexities and tensions in talanoa was in a panel discussion in response to the artwork *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me* (2018) which involved myself, fellow artist Salome Tanuvasa and chaired by curator/writer Ioana Gordon Smith. The panel was titled 'Informal Conversation on Art and Labour'. An opening question from the chair to the audience was: "What are the ethics of labour in your work?". A member from the audience stood up and asked me a question in an aggressive manner: "Are you valorising the factory workers in your practice?". I was unaware that this person had arrived late and missed the context of the previous panel discussion where I had positioned my practice in a way that it avoided valorisation of factory workers. Confused by the aggression, I shrugged my shoulders and said nothing, but audience members interjected, annoyed at the question being asked, reminding us of the earlier comments. What I learn from this is the importance of courtesy in arriving on time, committing time to a panel or conversation, and being careful not to hijack a situation. What I didn't expect was the collective interjection from the audience which was reassuring as an example of reciprocity and community support through talanoa.



A place where newcomers to Ashburton can market their traditional dishes from their home Countries and share it with the Ashburton Community.

The food court becomes the common ground, a neutral space for all walks of life to share stories and connect with different cultures.

Every weekend - Different newcomers family occupies the food stalls - Diverse cuisine.

Newcomers Kitchen, a food court to share food and culture.

Figure 14. Vea, J. (2018). *If you build it, they will come*, 1 of 8 property development drawings proposing for an international food court for the vacant i-site building. Group Exhibition: (UN)CONDITIONAL IV. Ashburton Art Gallery, Ashburton, New Zealand.

A third case of dilemmas in talanoa was at The Physics Room satellite group project called (Un)conditional IV, with my artwork titled *If you build it, they will come* (2018) highlighting the lack of face-to-face exchanges during my research residency in Ashburton. As a way of facilitating discussion, my artwork was formatted as a proposal to encourage talanoa by using an abandoned i-site and turning it into a food court for the purpose of being occupied by the migrants living in Ashburton. During this project there were difficulties in acquiring this space when the local council questioned my intentions for this abandoned i-site. Fortunately, I was staying with a councilman who helped me achieve this goal. In this context, talanoa was hindered through a lack of contact with migrants; a lack of opportunity for conversation. I solved this by proposing a site where migrants come together to share food, in the hope of also sharing cultural perspectives through talanoa.



Figure 15. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* installation opposite the Carriageworks Markets. Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia.

Another dilemma, or complexity, involving talanoa in my art practice is similar to problems encountered in the Ashburton project but this time the setting is in Carriageworks Market, Sydney, Australia. There were tensions in proposing the artwork with the existing market stall holders, which continued during the installation of the artwork. They objected to my installation occupying a prime position (negotiated with gallery staff) and tried to push me back behind the Carriageworks building where there were fewer market goers. This resulted in my artwork being installed directly opposite the market stalls a few feet away from the market in the foyer entrance of the Carriageworks building. This is discussed more in Chapter 4. A further dilemma involved difficulties in engaging with journalists from Aljazeera and ABC Australia, when they wanted information from me and I couldn't give them a diluted explanation which frustrated the journalist. This points out the problems of media coverage in soundbites which dilutes the lived experiences of talanoa which, as said, takes time to evolve.

Throughout this exegesis are demonstrations of practical dilemmas in talanoa. As Fa'avae *et al* suggest, I "openly explore" my "experienced difficulties" where I contextualise and "voice these complexities and tensions" in detail (2016:147), discussing how these issues form part of my approach to specific art projects in this practice-led PhD.

Inside or Outside

Across many of my projects, approaches to talanoa involve participants sharing personal encounters as mo‘oni (truthful, honest) accounts of their knowledge/knowing of the communities they come from. In this context, there are difficulties in my perspective and positioning of talanoa, as just pointed out by way of my involvement in the Honolulu Biennial and disagreements with assistant curator Ngahiraka Mason.

From these viewpoints, my art practice and its contextualisation through writing (in this exegesis) delve into discoveries around the notion of emic/etic and insider/outsider. By this I mean there have been key artworks where I have had to question who was emic and, most importantly, whether I was an insider. While I return to this discussion in detail in Chapter 2 The Emic Viewpoint, this section raises some important observations about privileged and nonprivileged research perspectives.

“Looking from the outside as an insider means I am more able than outsiders to explain my research participants to other outsiders” writes Fa‘avae (2016:139). Similar to my emic and etic description, Fa‘avae’s inside perspective as a person who comes from that particular culture offers a more accurate understanding than a person with an outside perspective who doesn’t come from that culture. Fa‘avae also considers himself as being the researcher, which also positions him on the outside perspective looking inside: “Being both an insider and an outsider in my research represents a privileged position” (2016:139).

As an extension to Fa‘avae’s ‘privileged position’, I compare this to people having two cultures: this could be through your parents coming from two different ethnic backgrounds and you’re raised in both cultures, or your parents migrating to Aotearoa and you are raised in the culture your parents come from while living in Aotearoa. But not many Pacific people see this as a privileged position. They tend instead to see it as something along the lines of a diluted perspective, a derogative interpretation.

Indigenous Perspectives

From the conclusion of Tecun *et al*, the main points that I would highlight in relation to my ongoing artistic practice are the way in which we need to reflect on our own phenomena, our circumstances and situation and the way in which this relates to collective memory (Tecun 2018:162). This is attempted in artworks such as *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*. This collective performance encourages participants to talanoa about being first generation New Zealanders and their relationship with Pacific Islanders and their places of origin as well as to diaspora communities in Aotearoa. As said, this will be further discussed in Talanoa Usu 1 and the way in which this artwork relies on the sharing talanoa of lived memories and experiences of the participants in relation to living here in Aotearoa as migrants, or children of migrant parents.

Another aspect that Tecun *et al* discuss is the way in which practices of talanoa value and champion knowledge systems (2018:162). In Chapter 3, for example, I relate this to the way in which artist Matavai, a participant in *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* who works with kumara in his own practice, gleans from his mother's experience the ways in which land is cultivated for the production of food.



Figure 16. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo*, still image. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau..

Tecun *et al* stress the point that talanoa involves “communicating with those who do or seek to work WITH us” (2018:162, original emphasis). This is a significant point for my overall project in that art collectives have a natural selection process in establishing forms of social cohesion. Before the collective occurs talanoa weeds out, or weeds in, what the collective is about and who is involved. In this way the Roots Collective, discussed in Chapter 3, Limbo and Pasifika Edgewalker, was formed by different creative skills for the purpose of helping Indigenous lower economic communities to use sustainable and recyclable materials. They formed as mentors for the have-nots in order to empower creative thinking and potential. In a project called Ko au te Awa, we mentored secondary students into producing a light sculpture for the Matariki festival held in Glen Innes, using bamboo materials and reflecting on why it is important for the conservation of our rivers in our neighbourhoods.



Figure 17. (2013). *The Roots: Creative Entrepreneurs, Ko Au Te Awa project*. Glen Innes, Auckland, New Zealand.

Tecun *et al* also stress how talanoa “navigates relationships as a critical relational orality” (2018:162). These three words, criticality, relationality, and orality are crucial to the unfolding of this thesis project. They relate to the grassroots or first encounter discussions in social relationships and engage with differences of opinion on many topics. In this respect, this project has an emphasis on critical social practice to share differences and perspectives that are not normally talked about by Pacific peoples in the diaspora. For example, the performance installation titled *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* (2019) which was part of the Performance Space: Liveworks Festival held at the Carriageworks Art Centre, Sydney, was designed to operate in conjunction with the Carriageworks markets on Saturdays. Using a market stall as a disguise, the purpose was to bring issues to light about the exploitation of Pacific peoples from the Pacific, working in the Recognised Seasonal Employment Scheme (RSE) in both New Zealand and Australia. A curious visit occurred from one of the stallholders at the Carriageworks markets as she engaged with the installation. She shared her experiences working with seasonal workers picking fruit. She mentioned the restricted rules that applied to the Pacific workers in comparison to the lenient rules for the backpackers that were mostly from Europe and America. This example highlights the significance of relational oral exchanges, spontaneous talanoa, and exchanges with no agenda, pre-discussion or rehearsing. These exchanges become open to each other. I discuss this project in detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the politics of talanoa.



Figure 18. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* installation opposite the Carriageworks Markets. Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia.

Transparent storytelling, facilitating is shared

With the purpose of building a democracy, Sitiveni Halapua defined talanoa as a process of storytelling that endeavours to be transparent without concealment. For Halapua, talanoa is a process for building democracy and stable governance where a facilitator can try to avoid points of view imposed by positions of leadership (2013:5). In Halapua's argument, the role of the facilitator is crucial in terms of gaining "a perspective in noa", occupying it, developing a sense of belonging together in it, and then trying to build a relationship between the stories of those in power and other people concerned (2013:5).

To some degree, this equates to a coming together before an agenda is introduced. This process "strips away all the myths and contaminations of human hierarchy and reveals the meanings in the different stories that participating storytellers share" (Halapua, 2013:2). *Tala* means to tell, announce or relate, while *noa* means nothing, void, or emptiness. But interpretation of such 'nothingness' has wide application. Halapua emphasizes the importance of *noa* for *talanoa* to be fluid, yet guided by a facilitator. Halapua alludes to *noa* as an agenda cleanser at the beginning stages of talanoa; storytellers/listeners detach themselves from any predetermined commitments and preconceived ideas of who they are in order for talanoa to flow (2013:1-3). From this perspective, Halapua's talanoa enables the participants to come and develop a sense of belonging together in *noa* without a pre-determined 'agenda'. It's a prelude; coming before something else. As if creating cohesion before differences are discussed.

Referencing Mahina and Shore, Tecun *et al* note the importance of a state of *noa* as equilibrium or balance of a way privileging Indigenous lens as they write.

This is a worthy endeavour and further positions the relationship of a researcher with a topic or people, and the connection that exists at the very least by genealogy or relationships. If we privilege the Indigenous lens though, then we notice the process of the protocols and the role they play to establish a state of Noa (equilibrium, balance) between people in order to be able to proceed more openly. (Tecun 2018:158; see 'O. Mahina, 2007; Shore, 1989)

They go on to note the importance of the way in which knowledge is "founded on relationships in states of Noa by means of protocols between people in place" (Tecun 2018:158).

My project engages with noa as a place of interaction or engagement and does not demarcate a beginning as a kind of warm up exercise. In this way, talanoa is more of a continual experience. It is therefore a platform where we could interact in a nothingness, where nothingness refers to a pre-setting, meaning you come in without an agenda. When discussions begin, the nothingness becomes something. In this respect “story is knowledge, and knowledge is gathered through story” (Tecun 2018:158). This interpretation may be at odds with some traditionalists who see talanoa as a way of seeking a result that is always harmonious and accurate. With the process of talanoa and the way it is traditionally used, it is necessary to establish how accurate and genuine a story gathered is.

Halapua’s interpretation of talanoa and the role a facilitator in relationship to the state of noa raises interesting questions. How do modes of performance art practice facilitate discussion and change in ways that are different from Halapua’s interpretation? I am not a facilitator in the strict sense of a meeting facilitator in building democracy and stable governance. Working with collectives in a performance art context means facilitating is shared amongst the collective where control becomes disestablished. We keep each other in check as a form of co-operation. Even though I initiate the projects, I share responsibilities as well as financial rewards.

Other participants, if we can call them that, set the standard or ‘topics’ for discussion. They can bring up topics as if unconsciously to talk through, and move from one topic to another. The experience can happen without me trying to fish for it; at a bus stop or in a taxi, for example. It is unpredictable and dependent on states of mind at the time and spatial interactions. A key question here is how noa becomes interpreted and deployed as state of nothingness. As has already been discussed, Vaiotei talks about noa as talking about nothing (2006:23). But the question arises as to the efficacy and meaning of talking about nothing.

As said, important to an understanding of talanoa for my project is that it’s not just a beginning exercise. Before an agenda is set, talanoa is conducted with locals and arts coordinators such as curators (all participants) with relatively no intention to gain anything or predetermine the artwork. It is a way of listening and gaining a perspective. While the artworks have a broad subject (such as seasonal workers in the diaspora) there is no agenda as understood in a stricter meeting sense. There are random engagements with locals that usually set the pace of the talanoa. There is a tacit understanding that this is a flawed process, which develops subjectivities within a cultural context. As a result of this particular process of gathering information, a story comes to light, within a story being gathered. From this perspective, the idea of a story within a story is common in my research and artwork. The terms emic and etic (discussed further in Chapter 2) come into play once the artwork is created and shown to others (viewers/audiences). Their reaction to the artwork, and how they will interpret the artwork in discussion with others, creates a further palimpsest of talanoa: the artwork which is made on the basis of talanoa becomes an extension in a naturally talanoaic process in the social.

Halapua's interpretation of talanoa has some parallels to this thesis project where he suggests talanoa begins with participants detaching themselves from any predetermined or preconceived ideas about something in order to achieve cohesion, although there is still some kind of agenda. A difference is that my project's approach with talanoa is conducted with the purpose of engaging with a community through relatively uncontrolled local dialogue with the intention not to retrieve information but to let it flow naturally through social interaction.

I'm not concerned with going to a meeting to discuss politics but the interactions might be political. Here, noa is naturally a default between strangers and the agenda is entirely dependent on participants. Hence, noa can also refer to the spontaneous meeting place where talanoa is being held. This might be similar to the description of Vaioleti's interpretation of talanoa where he translates it in English as literally means talking about nothing in particular.

Conclusion

This chapter is a summary of some relevant literature concerning the Indigenous concept of talanoa. I introduced this chapter with a non-academic interpretation of talanoa, described as a lived experience from my upbringing. This was followed by a summary of academic literature from Pacific, Māori and Mayan scholars who have their own understanding of talanoa. In response to the literature review is my own interpretation of talanoa, defined as a way of being, a lived research experience, which further provokes discussion about key concerns for this project in the way I practice talanoa. For example, I discussed how fanongo talanoa of lived memories and lived experiences builds connections between you and participants (or family). Another key concern is relationality: these lived memories and experiences shared develop an understanding of others and myself in relation. This in turn involves a capacity to let go of oneself, sometimes in long durations as slow trust emerges. Following these key concerns, I emphasised an important talanoa principle of Pō talanoa. Pō talanoa is described by Vaioleti, mentioned in Fa'avae's text, "as talking in everyday matters such as politics, church matters, children, television" (2016:143) but I extended this to also imply night or after hours talanoa. I then looked into 'doing' talanoa (Fa'avae *et al*, 2016:139) and the practical dilemmas that I come across. In response to these practical dilemmas, I talked about the importance of emic/etic or insider/outsider as an artist and researcher. In relation to the importance of positioning ourselves as researchers through emic/etic, I discussed the importance of valuing and championing our own knowledge systems (Tecun 2018:162). And lastly, I discussed talanoa as transparent storytelling and how the role of a facilitator might be fluid in a collective project.

Talanoa Usu 1: *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016)

These Talanoa Usu intervals focus on the art projects or events that have taken place during this practice led PhD. The segments are slotted in between the chapters to give an insight into how talanoa is embodied through a practical framework in each art project. In addition, each Talanoa Usu references writers and scholars who are from the same place or culture as the art works are created for.

Talanoa Usu 1 discusses the collective performance artwork titled *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*, carried out at the Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, in 2016. The aim here is to discuss the complexities of collective performance art practice in relation to participants such as curators, kaitiaki of venues and collective members. Fanongo talanoa will emerge as a sharing of lived memories, experiences and conflicts in a process of relation to one another, trusting in a process, letting oneself go. Pō talanoa is further contextualised through this artwork. During this Talanoa Usu I refer to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies* to assist in the explanation of the research strategies I have used in making *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*.

The following is a diary account of the research methods and processes enabling the artwork *One kiosk, Many Exchanges* to come into being. I do this to embody an inside autoethnographic (discussed in Chapter 2) perspective on my engagements with the individuals that make up the project. It reveals, as a first-person-narrative, perspectives into neighbourhoods: how I explore participatory performance and the role of mentor as a form of collaboration and mentoring performance. It also reveals an exploration of self-assessment as a form of establishing a position; managing conflict, fitting in, as an autoethnography that proposes whanaungatanga in creating lasting and ongoing relationships with people. In this way the artwork extends beyond its so-called parameters into a social way of being, similar to how Charles Ropitini reflects on his own childhood in relation to Edith Amituanai's project *Keeping on Kimi Ora* (discussed in Chapter 2) gaining agency as a ripple effect that could be infinite.

Want to play footy? Friday January 1st, 2016

Back in 2016, a friend of mine asked if I wanted to play footy for a Rugby League club he was coaching. I thought “why not” and decided to take up the offer to play league for a club I wasn’t local to: based in Howick, a suburb town east of Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland).



Figure 19. (2016). *Playing for the Howick Hornets Rugby League club.* Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.

What is Fencibles? Tuesday March 1st, 2016

Every time I would go to footy training, I noticed the term ‘Fencibles’ on signage around the eastern suburban area. For example, the local soccer club is named ‘Fencibles United AFC’, the local Pharmacy is named the ‘Fencible Pharmacy’ and there is a Howick Historical Village dedicated to the ‘Fencibles’ community. Noticeably, the local Rugby League Club I was playing for at the time did not adapt the Fencibles name, perhaps because the Howick Hornets Rugby League Club consisted of a majority of players from out of town, and, like myself, a large number came from South Auckland.

Thursday March 17th, 2016

I became interested in the Fencibles name. I had a vague understanding of where the term came from since my school trips to the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) as a young fella where I had first come across the name. In the Museum there is a settlers' village exhibit with an 1848 fencible cottage extracted from Ireland Road, Panmure (Museum of Transport and Technology, n.d.).

The suburb of Howick, formerly occupied by Ngāi Tai, was taken by Europeans in 1847 when three companies of the Royal New Zealand Fencibles were assigned to a defence post: "They were retired soldiers enlisted to serve for seven years in exchange for a cottage and an acre of land. Howick was the largest of the Fencible settlements, with 804 people in three companies in 1848" (Howick Historical Village, n.d.). In this text retrieved from a government website it is interpreted that Howick "was settled by Europeans in 1847", an example of many land confiscations from Tangata Whenua by the British in Aotearoa that are still to this day being construed as an 'harmonious exchange' or 'settled' (New Zealand History, n.d.).

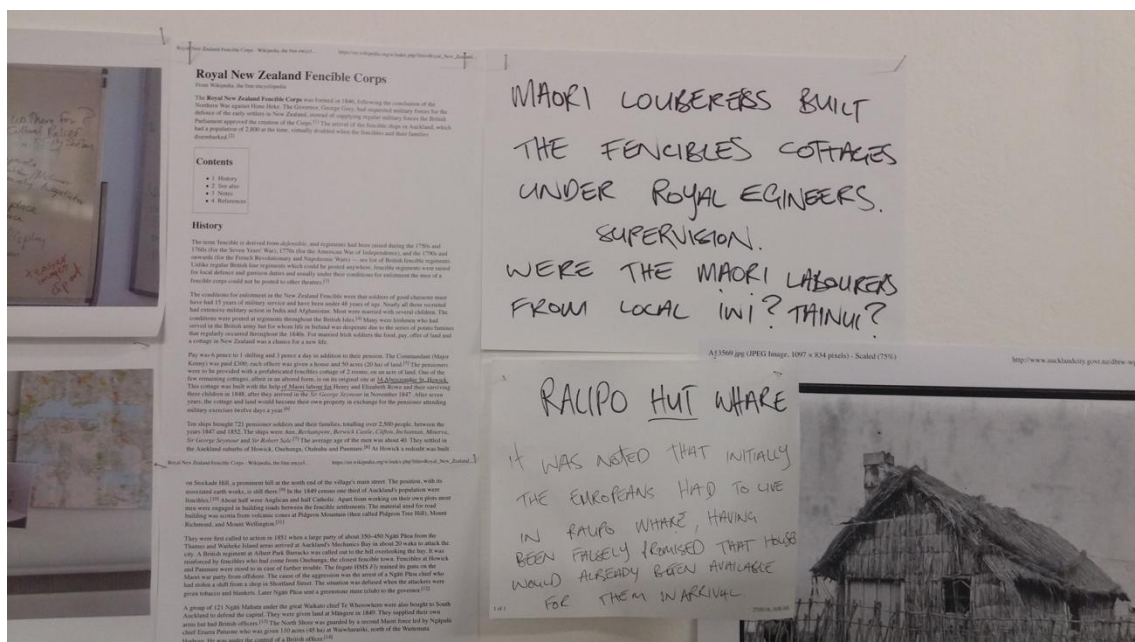


Figure 20. (2016). Research drawings for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project. AUT PhD Studios, AUT City campus, New Zealand.

Invitation to a Group Exhibition - Saturday August 20th, 2016

During the same year, in 2016, Te Tuhi Curator at the time, Bruce Phillips invited me to take part in an Exhibition titled, 'Share/Cheat/Unite'. As noted on the Te Tuhi website:

Share/Cheat/Unite, an exhibition in three parts: a group show, a research initiative and a series of live offsite commissions. The exhibition delves into the human psyche to consider how altruism, cheating and group formation appear to play a key role in shaping society, but not necessarily in the way we might assume. Could it be that when we cheat and lie, we are not doing wrong but rather acting out instinctual aspects of innovation for the greater good? Likewise, when we claim to be altruistic by sharing are we not aiming to personally benefit in some way? When we form groups are we really free-thinking individuals or do we become mindless units bound by social mimicry and crowd unity? And could this moral ambiguity between our destructive and our humane tendencies be the reason for our evolutionary advantage over other species? (Phillips, 2016)

My role in this project was to participate in the group exhibition and to facilitate one of the live offsite commissions as well as the group collaborations. My playing for the Howick Hornets Rugby League Club was a simultaneous and unplanned aspect of the project. From this perspective, it was important to note that research can be research when you're not seeking it out. By this I mean that I was trying to avoid situating talanoa as a research methodology, and rather describe it as 'already being in it'. I mentioned my involvement with the Howick Hornets Rugby League Club with curator Bruce Phillips, and in that talanoa about the ramifications of the Fencibles, he introduced me to kuia (female elder) Taini Drummond who is the kaitiaki (guardian) of the Emilia Maud Nixon Garden of Memories, situated in the Howick area. In The Garden of Memories is a small museum called Te Whare Taongo Te Raukohekohe, which contains a collection of historical taonga dating back about 100 years. It also contains a wharenuī called Te Whare Wananga O Owairoa which offers cultural and historical experiences of the gardens through a Māori context led by Kaitiaki Drummond (Citizens Advice Bureau, n.d.).



Figure 21. (2016). Research drawings for *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* project. AUT PhD Studios, AUT City campus, New Zealand.

A first generation of the British occupant, Emilia Maud Nixon was born in the year 1870 in Waikato during the closing years of the New Zealand land wars. After teaching for 33 years, she moved to Howick in 1925 to retire. Nixon had purchased 2673 sqm of land in Uxbridge Road, where she set about turning this property into a living folk museum of New Zealand history as a way to foster understanding between Māori and Pākehā which will be later called The Garden of Memories. Her interest in Māori culture and history may have derived from her close friendships formed in Waikato with Princess Te Puia and Rachael Ngeungeu Zister the great granddaughter of Ngai Tai Chief Tara-te-Irirangi (Corbett, 2007).

As discussed below, and in the context of my project *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*, the Royal New Zealand Fencibles debate is critiqued, for example, in the art practice of Jimmy Wulf who highlights the possible arson of the old Whare Torere in 2004 on the site of the Emilia Maud Nixon Garden of Memories and local resistance to rebuilding the Whare. In relationship to the curator's brief, this seemed to play out some of the moral ambiguity between our destructive and our humane tendencies. Using talanoa as the main catalyst of this project, the result comes in the form of social theatre from our experiences of Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa.

Meeting with Kaitiaki Taini Drummond - Thursday September, 1st 2016

Bruce Phillips and Andrew Kennedy's introduction to Kuia Taini had played a significant role in my approach to the art project which, as said, was initiated by the visible influence of the Fencible community within the Howick area. Previous to meeting Kuia Taini, I had expressed my concern about acting as an outsider, having no personal connection to the town of Howick (other than representing the Howick area through my participation with the Rugby League Club). Together with this, my perspective as a Tongan born in Aotearoa may not directly relate to tensions between Tangata Whenua and Pākehā at the heart of the Fencible debate.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, discussing the practical dilemmas of talanoa, my colleague reminded me of the dilemmas of looking inside a cultural situation from the outside. Here, the talanoa can be a sharing of cultural perspectives, 'giving voice' (Smith, 2012:189), but it can also unintentionally lead to a more directive role. This highlights the importance of the introduction from curator Bruce Phillips and the importance of face-to-face discussion with the Kaitiaki of The garden Memories, Taini Drummond. This first case has become a guide on how to approach upcoming projects with complex cultural positioning and identity. In saying this, talanoa has become adaptable to these dilemma's as they are very different in each circumstance.



Figure 22. (2016). *Kaitiaki Taini Drummond and for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project*. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.

I shared my conflicts with Kaitiaki Drummond in a Pō talanoa, who rubbished my concerns about being an outsider. I asked Kuia Taini a question about the relationship between the Pacific people and Tangata Whenua. I guess, for me, I wanted to have assurance that I was doing something good on her behalf. She replied comically: “we are all the same, you guys just got off the waka earlier”, alluding to the sea ferrying migration of the Pacific peoples to Aotearoa. These exchanges of talanoa and fanongo talanoa created a connection between myself in relation to Kaitiaki Taini. With this, the Pō talanoa had evolved into Drummond becoming a Kaitiaki to the art project, but importantly she became a cultural/community advisor who mentored me in how to negotiate my etic stand point. In this respect, cooperating with an individual or collective who belongs to a community is an approach I consider important in my art practice. Kuia Taini offered me guidance to reflect on communities I don’t belong to. This will be discussed further in Chapter 2, where I stress that the emic viewpoint relies on local guidance and people inside communities with respect to the artists Edith Amituanai, Janet Lilo’s and Kalisolaite ‘Uhila’. These Indigenous methodologies pre-empt what American Linguist Kenneth Pike refers to as an analysis of cultural experience from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being researched (Riva & Arozqueta, 2013).

Gaining Trust

Looking into the impact of colonisation and legitimisation of knowledge in ‘research’, Tuhiwai Smith states that Māori communities today have distrust and suspicion of researchers. This is not just towards non-Indigenous researchers but of the whole philosophy of research and its principles involved in the process (Smith, 2012:175-176). These are dilemmas I come across when I approach an art project either through my own community or especially when I sit outside these communities. Smith refers to a group of questions that need to be asked as researchers (or artists) in a cross-cultural context (2012:175-176). I relate and rephrase these questions by Smith to my approach with research through talanoa in an art framework:

- Who defined the art/social problem?
- For whom is this artwork worthy and relevant? Who says so?
- What knowledge will the community gain from this art installation/performance?
- What knowledge will the artist gain from this artwork?
- What are some likely positive outcomes from this artwork?
- What are the possible negative outcomes?
- To whom is the artist accountable?
- What processes are in place to support the artwork, the participants in the talanoa and the artist?

Wednesday September 17th, 2016

The talanoa with Taini Drummond made me think about the relations between Pacific people and Tangata Whenua living together in Aotearoa. As a PhD Graduate Assistant (GA) at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), I became familiar with the art practices of some of the Pacific undergraduate students in the Visual Arts Programme. Talanoa and fanongo talanoa gradually emerged from group studio critiques with third-year students Valasi Leota-Seiuli, Newman Tumata, Jimmy Wulf and Sione Mafi establishing a connection between our own lived memories and experiences in relation to our families lived memories and experiences. I invited them to participate in *One Kiosk Many Exchanges*, and, at the same time, their art practices influenced the direction of the project. The more we engaged through talanoa, the more trust was built and the more open we have become with each other.

Giving voice

Smith connects the Māori concept of *whānau* as a way of organizing research which is an “important aspect of Kaupapa Māori approaches”. She describes whānau research methodology as a collective approach to research,

a way of organizing a research group, a way of incorporating ethical procedures that report back to the community, a way of “giving voice” to the different sections of Māori communities, and a way of debating ideas and issues that impact on the research project. (2012:189)

As said, in *One Kiosk Many Exchanges*, I asked this group of third year students to share their lived memories and experiences. To offer a different perspective than from my own, a way of organising an art group and a way of ‘giving voice’ to the different Pacific experiences in living here in Aotearoa.

Limbo as a site of belonging

Being Pacific and living in the hegemony of New Zealand has often marginalised us. For this project, it gives us a unique perspective in enabling an inside/outside view of social issues we come across as migrants, or children of immigrants. Here, Smith writes:

The metaphor of the margin has been very powerful in the social sciences and humanities for understanding social inequality, oppression, disadvantage and power. It is used alongside other similar concepts such as borders, boundaries, bridges, centre-periphery, and insider-outsider to demarcate people in the spatial terms as well as in socio-economic, political and cultural terms. Anthropology uses the term “liminal” to capture some of the elements that are lived by people in the margins. (2012:204)

I interpret liminal sites as being in limbo while also a place or perspective I belong to. Smith refers to African American writer Bell Hooks who wrote of the “radical possibility of ‘choosing the margins’ as a site of belonging as much as a site of struggle and resistance” (Smith, 2012:204-205). People who end up in these liminal/limbo sites ‘choose’ the margins to establish cultures and identities from this perspective (Smith, 2012:205). I discuss this topic further in Chapter 3 Limbo and Pasifika Edgewalker and the significance of lived research experience through Pacific collectives. These participants involved in the *One Kiosk Many Exchanges* project, either deliberately or not, all reflect on their art practices from these liminal/limbo sites.

Participants

Aotearoa born Samoan Valasi Leota-Seiuli, who has an installation performance practice, was interested in her father’s experience growing up during the dawn raids.³ She composed a song reflecting her father’s upbringing in the 1980s, she sang the song inside a closet as her performance.

³ As Samoan writer and senior lecturer in Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland Melani Anae described the Dawn Raids in her book *The Platform: The Radical Legacy of the Polynesian Panthers, in 1970-1980 NZ police would randomly go into Pacific peoples’ homes looking for overstayers, “the most blatantly racist attack on Pacific peoples by the New Zealand government in New Zealand’s history”*

Newman Tumata is of Niuean descent born in Aotearoa. He has a print making practice and he was producing posters that reflected 1990s central Auckland gang culture.⁴ He used insignia that only certain people who grew up in the central area would understand. At the time he sold the posters to keep up with rent.



Figure 23. Wulf, J. (2016). *Talanoa with my German ancestors*. [Performance]. Year 3 BVA group critique, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand.

Jimmy Wulf is a painter but often used performance. He was interested in connecting with his German ancestors.⁵ Jimmy found old pictures of his German relatives and learnt German phrases. For a performance in his group critique, he would converse in broken German with the old photos of his German relations. Jimmy is of Samoan and German descent born in Aotearoa.

Tongan born Sione Mafi has an installation practice. He was looking into occupying public places illegally. He guerrilla planted taro in the public library garden to see how foreign plants are treated in a public site. He often reflects his practice with his experience living in Aotearoa.

⁴ In the 1990s in South and Central Auckland “during the decade a new style of youth gang emerged based on modern American street gangs and influenced by hip-hop culture and Hollywood movies (sometimes called ‘LA-style street gangs’).” <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/library-research-papers/research-papers/youth-gangs-in-new-zealand/>

⁵ “In 1900, Western Samoa came under German colonial rule. The German language held a certain prestige there which is mirrored by the numbers of voluntary Samoan learners of German.” Stolberg, D. (2013). German in Samoa: Historical traces of a colonial variety. *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics*, 49(3), 321-353. <https://doi.org/10.1515/psicl-2013-0012>

These artist/participants and their varied stories highlight the multiple ways in which Indigenous communities might form. Smith outlines the ways in which community is defined or imagined in multiple ways: “as physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces”. And she goes to describe how communities “have also made themselves, however, despite policies aimed at fragmenting family bonds and separating people from their traditional territories” (2012:128-129).

Emic/Insider Talanoa, Tuesday October 4th, 2016

The students spent a day with Kaitiaki Taini Drummond at the Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories. She invited us into the Owairoa Marae and, through talanoa, she shared her knowledge and experiences of Emilia, the Garden and the Wharenui and Wharetaonga, and what role it plays within the Howick community. Her insight to the Garden of Memories was important to the students as they were going to respond to the area from their personal perspective, taking the knowledge from Taini and reflecting that knowledge on their own experiences with relations to this whenua.



Figure 24. (2016). *Kaitiaki Taini Drummond, Valasi Leota-Seiuli, Newman Tumata and Jimmy Wulf in Owairoa Marae. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.*

Concerned with issues of unity, temporality, permanence, monumentality and public sites, the cooperative performance *One Kiosk Many Exchanges* aimed to explore how local contemporary artists from different cultural backgrounds could cooperate through performance art as a means to critically navigate and inspire the public to friendly discourse with the guidance of Tangata Whenua Taini Drummond.

The performance opens with the H.E.P.T. collective known only by their acronym (which will be discussed further in Chapter 3), their identities are not specified as they prefer to be anonymous even though their faces are recognised in the performance. They quietly, and in sync, carry a folded kiosk into the Garden of Memories like pallbearers carrying a coffin to its final resting place; kiosk-bearers if you like.

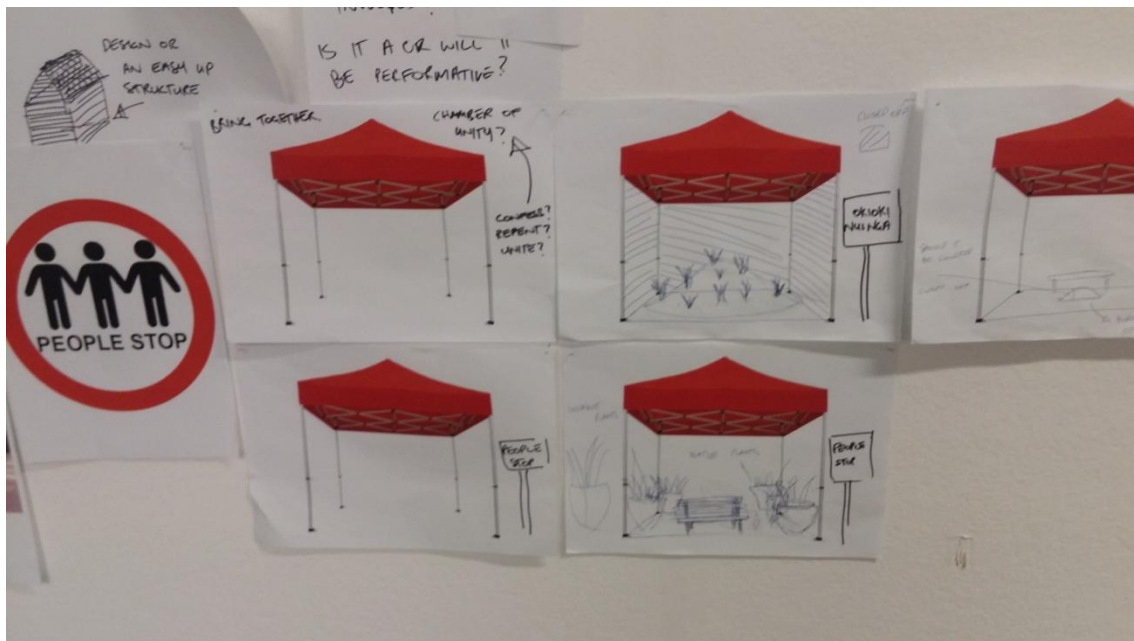


Figure 25. (2016). *Research drawings for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project*. AUT PhD Studios, AUT City campus, New Zealand.

Usually, we associate kiosks with temporary stalls in the middle of shopping malls. I take this term from its historical context originated in Turkey/Persia, described as an open summer-house or pavilion usually having its roof supported by pillars with screened or totally open walls (Wikipedia, n.d.). The H.E.P.T. collective say the following words in relation to their actions:



Figure 26. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, the H.E.P.T. collective*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

The Performance, Saturday October 8th, 2016

‘Io
Yes

Lalo
down

‘Alu ki tu‘a
go out

Hiki ki ‘olunga
lift it up

Ha‘u ki loto
come in

Tuku ki lalo
put it down

The H.E.P.T. collective stops outside the wharetaonga. One of them signals to the rest of the kiosk-bearers. You can faintly hear the verbal instructions followed by the actions to construct the collapsed kiosk which is executed meticulously as if the kiosk-bearers do this daily. The assembled kiosk stands on its own with the bearers at each corner facing the centre of the kiosk waiting for something to happen.



Figure 27. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, the H.E.P.T. collective*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

The first location within the Garden of Memories was chosen by Valasi who unfolds and places a fala (mat) in the middle of the constructed kiosk. She sits barefoot cross legged on top of the fala as if she is recollecting herself. In her hand is a piece of paper and a plastic lei; the cheap knockoffs you can purchase at a \$2 dollar store. The plastic lei, even though it's fake, was a conscious decision on our part. A subtle reference to cultural property being taken and sold back to us: a familiar narrative that most Tangata Whenua face today in relation to land ownership and cultural assets.



Figure 28. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Valasi Leota-Seiuli*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Le Ula e, momoli atu e o‘u lima

Le Ula e, momoli atu e o‘u lima
I stand with this lei in hand

E viia le folasia, lagi ma tuā lagi
To sing to whom laid the land

Fatu e fusi ae le tumau
I gather my heart to exchange

O tigā o‘u tagata
My words of song of our peoples’ pain

Ua pese ai le failaga
I sing to you lady, my lei is for you

Fa‘afiafia, tama‘ita‘i sili
To honour your spirit

La‘u asoa pale lona ao
From the past to the new

Manatua agaalofa agalelei
Remember your love and kindness

Aso ua te'a, aso o tupulaga fou
For the new generation

Valasi composed a spoken word poem in response to Kaitiaki Taini's knowledge of the Garden of Memories, like she did for her father's experience in the dawn raids. She confesses her understanding of the Samoan language is broken and the poem, written in Samoan, may not make sense to Samoans who speak it fluently: she wanted to make a point highlighting her lack of understanding of her culture. While she sits on the fala, she begins to sing the newly composed poem which is written on the paper in her hand. With the plastic lei and the piece of paper, Valasi gets up off the fala while simultaneously in song and walks slowly towards the wharetaonga. Inside the wharetaonga is a memorial section for Emilia Maude Nixon and Valasi offers the plastic lei as a gift and returns back to the kiosk. She folds the fala back up and her response ends.

Quietly instructed, the bearers collapse the kiosk in their usual meticulous manner. They carefully move on to the next location. With his baseball cap and sunglasses on, Newman stands by at his chosen location for his response. Once the kiosk is constructed by the bearers, Valasi unfolds the fala and places it in the kiosk. Newman takes his shoes off before stepping on the fala, sits down cross legged and places his A3 posters in a pile next to him. He takes a quiet moment and then begins his response.



Figure 29. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Newman Tumata*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

As an example of letting oneself go, for Newman's first performance experience, he confesses that he's out of his elements, a printmaker by trade. But naturally, he performs these exchanges as if he is selling his posters at his local markets, this time no words are exchanged. He gets up from the fala, he takes his baseball cap off and walks around gesturing to the audience to put something in. Some oblige and put koha in, most nod with confusion. He returns to the fala and gathers his A3 posters and starts handing them out one by one to the audience, whether or not they put something in his cap, they all received a poster.

This aspect of Newman's performance was done on the fly; we all thought he was going to simultaneously handout posters with his cap gesturing to put koha in. I don't think it was a conscious effort on Newman's behalf but his improvisation was much more powerful. The gesture that asks for koha first, but where everyone else benefits might reference how certain people work not just for themselves but for the benefit of larger communities. It references movements that talk about the idea of one's labour benefiting a collective. The Recognised Seasonal Employee (RSE) worker comes over to Aotearoa and works, but that labour benefits the family or the village they come from.



Figure 30. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Newman Tumata*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Newman's art practice reflects on local historical insignia and produces posters out of them, almost as a reminder to those who forgot that these symbols once had a significant role within the community. He employed the same approach with *One Kiosk Many Exchanges*, researching symbols and images to do with Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories and generated posters to remind Howick locals why this place exists and an appreciation for newcomers to this place. The little koha given in the performance was offered to Kaitiaki Taini Drummond. Newman concludes his response, returning to the kiosk and folding the fala back up ready for the next response.

Once again, the instructions are quietly spoken, the bearers carefully collapse the kiosk and move on to the next location. Wearing an ie faitaga (formal lavalava) and holding a picture frame, Jimmy is waiting in front of the wharenuui, Te Whare Wananga O Owairoa for his response. The kiosk-bearers make their way to his position, the commands are spoken once more to construct the kiosk. This time it's Newman's role to unfold the fala and place within the structure.

Jimmy takes his shoes off before he walks onto the fala, he sits cross legged facing towards the Marae. Like Valasi and Newman he takes a breather before he begins his response. He gets up and walks towards the wharenuui, he carefully positions the picture frame facing outwards on the steps of the wharenuui and returns to the kiosk to sit back down facing both wharenuui and the picture frame.

The image in the picture is an image of the old whare Torere that once stood where the newly constructed Te Whare Wananga O Owairoa is standing now: a suspected arson attack on a Labour weekend Sunday in 2004 from supposedly people who opposed the idea of having anything Māori in the Howick community (Corbett, 2007). That same kind of people also opposed the rebuild of the Marae. One of the local residents, Peter O'Conner, who was in favour of the rebuild accused the opposers that: "At the end of the day you don't want Māori or Māori things - not even a single Māori word is allowed in Howick" (New Zealand Herald, 2000).

As Jimmy sits facing both the image of the old Whare and in front of the new Whare, Taini's mokopuna (grandchild) comes into frame and she plays next to the old image on the steps. An unintended metaphoric display of three generations represented: the past with the image of Whare Torere, the present with the new Te Whare Wananga O Owairoa and the future Kaitiaki's mokopuna are to receive Jimmy's response. He starts to sing an old Samoan hymn titled "Lo Ta Nu'u, Ua Ou Fanau Ai" (My dear country, where I was born). While he sings, the winds start to pick up as if a spiritual appreciation of the gesture. Similar to Valasi' broken Samoan, he sings in broken German dialect with his German ancestors through an old photo. He concludes his response with a moments silence, gets up and folds the fala. The Kiosk-bearers go through their disassembling routine again, ready for the next location.



Figure 31. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Jimmy Wulf*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Lota Nu‘u, ua ou Fanau ai

Lota Nuū ua ou fanau ai

My dear country, where I was born

Ua lelei oe i le vasa e

You are the most beautiful in the ocean

Ua e maua mai luga

You have obtained from above

O le tofi aoga!

A most important inheritance / duty

Tali/Chorus:

Samoana, (Samoana)

People of Samoa

Ala mai, (Ala mai)

Arise (wake up)

Fai ai nei, (Fai ai nei)

Give (now)

Le fa‘afetai, (Le fa‘afetai)

Your thanksgiving

I le pule, ua mau ai

To the Most High, who gave you

O lou nu‘u, i le vasa e

Your island / country, here in the ocean

In response to a discussion about the significance of Māori identity tied to whenua/land, Smith references African American Bernice Reagon as she describes “her own community as one held together by song rather than by territory”. And this is followed by another comment from an Aborigine friend, that “we sing the land to existence” (Smith, 2012:129). From this perspective, Valasi, with her composed song sings the Emilia Maude Nixon’s gift and intentions for the Howick community to existence, and Jimmy’s tribute to old wharenuī sings a tragedy to existence.



Figure 32. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*, Sione Mafi. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

With his kumete (kava bowl) and two green buckets sitting down in a grassy area, Sione Mafi waits patiently for the bearers to construct the kiosk. Jimmy unfolds the fala and places it within the structure. A barefooted Sione starts to set up his kumete on the fala, leaving the two buckets behind. Like the others he sits with a moments silence before he prepares the kava ritual. The preparation happens in the exterior of the kiosk where the two green buckets are left. One bucket has water inside and the other has the bag of kava ready to be sieved to mix the kava concoction. Once mixed, Sione fills his kumete.⁶

⁶ To access the video of the art performance *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016) go to this link: <https://vimeo.com/187071056>



Figure 33. Vea, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Sione Mafi*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Tongan philosopher Futa Helu discusses in a Tongan context the importance of kava ceremonies for acknowledging a person's status within that society. As he describes it as a 'social theatre', he says: "Rituals to me are social theatre. They have a moral or morals [sic] lesson to teach people, about that society. And kava ceremony is the centrepiece of our culture and our rituals system" (Smith, 2011).



Figure 34. (2016). *Post-performance photo with Kaitiaki Taini Drummond*. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.

Conclusion

As a result of talanoa, these rituals as social theatre have been central to this Talanoa Usu's discussion about a simultaneous alliance of playing footy for the Howick Hornets Rugby League Club, research into the Royal New Zealand Fencibles, and an invitation from Te Tuhi Curator Bruce Phillips to take part in the Exhibition 'Share/Cheat/Unite'. Through interrelated meetings through Pō talanoa and fanongo talanoa, this artwork *One Kiosk many Exchanges* provocatively acted out rituals pertinent to the Tainui Emilia Maud Nixon Garden of Memories comprising its small whare taonga called Te Raukohekohe and its whareniui called Owairoa Marae. Noting the importance of participants who practically embody the theories of talanoa outlined in Chapter 1, this artwork relies on the sharing of lived memories and experiences of the participants in relation to living here in Aotearoa as migrants, or as children of migrant parents. In this, we extend our lived memories and experiences of our parents, or our family living in Aotearoa, in relation to our own, giving an intergenerational view of lived memories and experiences that influence our art practice. This relates to Smith's assertion that Indigenous methods include many examples of projects that "have been initiated by local people working in local settings, generating local solutions to local problems" (Smith, 2012:129). This leads into the next chapter titled 'The Emic Viewpoint' looking at lived memories and experiences from an inside perspective and dilemmas associated with an outside perspective.

Chapter 2: The Emic Viewpoint (insider)

As introduced in Chapter 1, the emic/etic insider/outsider dynamic involves exploring the researcher's perspective and position. This question of who is emic relates to how I position myself as an insider in the research. This reiterates a question mentioned by Fa'avae *et al*: what is seeing from the inside as a New Zealand-raised Tongan and how we think critically about Indigenous research practices (2016:140). Overall, I ask the question: how do I, and other Pacific artists, use the emic viewpoint?

Emic and Etic

I first encountered this term in Jorge Satorre's exhibition 'Emic Etic?' at Artspace Auckland in 2013. Satorre talks about the ideas of etic and emic, the terms coined by American linguist Kenneth Pike in the 1950s, as a hermeneutic contribution to the field of anthropology. The word 'emic' involves analysis of cultural experience from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being researched, and 'etic' involves analysis of cultural experience from the perspective of one who does not participate in the culture being researched (Riva & Arozqueta, 2013).

From the emic, or inside perspective, cultural anthropologists attempt to understand a culture from the native's point of view. From the etic, or outside perspective, anthropologists approach cultural practices externally, looking into a culture (Morris *et al*, 1999:781).

This concept of perspective-driven research is not new. Late 19th-century anthropologists operated from their own 'perspectives' and were sometimes termed 'armchair' anthropologists. Even though this notion of 'perspective' in research gathering comes from an anthropological domain (which is a field that often positions my culture under the microscope), Indigenous peoples can turn this around by using emic and autoethnographic methods and approaches. Accordingly, I find the emic perspective an important viewpoint to be able to talanoa from a position where the researcher sits inside the culture being researched.

Ethnography and autoethnography:

In the context of ethnography, autoethnography introduces an insider approach where researchers analyse their own 'positions' with respect to other cultural fields of knowledge. As Heewon Chang writes: "Autoethnography is ethnographical and autobiographical at the same time" (Chang, 2007). In this respect, autoethnography can be a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context.

In this area of the exegesis, I want to begin to conflate ideas about auto-ethnography, an emic point of view, and Pacific notions of talanoa. Clearly, all these methods involve prioritising and giving voice to Indigenous peoples. If ethnography is the writing up of anthropology which one could interpret as old school field notes, then I am borrowing this idea to talk about ‘field notes’ that are about me in my own community. This is an interpretation of autoethnography where Indigenous peoples empower themselves and their communities.

Having an art practice, and being able to initiate a talanoa from inside the culture I belong to, gives a certain measure of solidarity in regards to being able to tap into a source in your own backyard. My perspective in my art practice is always from my own culture. It is a perspective I’ve relied on when talking about social political issues mainly around migrant labour. Being able to talk from an experience, and especially an understanding of taking part in the laborious activities, an emic talanoa becomes a strategic engagement that prioritises immersive experience.

Artists co-operating with the emic avenue

What follows in this chapter is a literature review as a way of discussing autoethnography and emic. I will focus on Edith Amituanai’s art project *Keeping on Kimi Ora* (2018), Janet Lilo’s art installation *Right of Way* (2013) and Kalisolaite ‘Uhila’s lived experience performance artwork *Mo‘ui Tukuhausia* (2012 & 2015).

Edith Amituanai: *Keeping on Kimi Ora*

Edith Amituanai’s *Keeping on Kimi Ora* project at Hastings City Art Gallery in 2018 engaged with local communities in an art project with the aim of making participation a visible approach. Amituanai got to know the school community in particular and introduced photography as a tool for social exchange and empowerment. Children begin to use the camera to tell their own stories. For the duration of five weeks, participants documented aspects of their own lives and communities.

This process means that the project becomes, in large part, out of the artist’s immediate control. The results of the project become as much about the participating people as about the artist herself.

In Amituanai's *Keeping on Kimi Ora* project, the emic viewpoint is through the kids of Kimi Ora community school in Flaxmere, Hastings. Amituanai surrenders her camera to what we may consider the 'subject', who are the children who attend the community school. The kids are given free-range to take photographs from their perspective of their living landscape. The subject becomes the photographer, and the photographer becomes the mentor.



Figure 35. Amituanai, E. (2017). *Edith Amituanai, 'A feed at Flaxmere park'*. [Photograph]. Pantograph Punch. <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/review-keepsonkimiora>

Certainly, an aspect of emic is explored via the kids' perspective of their living environment and experiences, but there is also an emic experience revealed through Amituanai in her working process as an artist; the kids get an insight into what it's like to be an artist, how and where they exhibit their photographs in a gallery space, which they would have never imagined possible previously. In this sense, an insider view of practice, methods and culture is revealed for artist and community. A social exchange of emic perspectives and experiences.

In the project catalogue there are three texts written by Ron Brownson, Lana Lopesi and Charles Ropitini responding to the project *Keeping on Kimi Ora*.

Brownson describes the project as empowering, as it blends the seeing of others with the seeing of ourselves and shows how young people can see each other in their own environment. Aspects of the emic viewpoint are evident in Brownson's description of the project (MacKinnon et al, 2018:10).

Ropitini's perception of Flaxmere is reflected in Amituanai's *Keeping on Kimi Ora* series, especially in the eyes of the children captured by the camera. As a person who grew up in flaxmere, Ropitini's emic viewpoint is reflected in the kid's photography. In looking at the images he sees himself as a young boy; seeing himself through their photographs. He writes:

The eyes of the children show me their Flaxmere world, the photographs show me the ownership they have of their place and the freedom in which the exercise that ownership, whether it be doubling a meet through the streets on a bike, turning a dark and dangerous alley way into a bowling den or making the highest basketball hoop a throne. It is the innocence of the children in the natural environment that is magical and something that would be hard to generally capture in another part of Hastings. (MacKinnon et al, 2018:21)

This project is particularly complex in the way in which it entangles many people in a kind of emic process. The schoolchildren are clearly given agency through the power of the camera. The artist is then revealed through this process as the children work with her; her methodologies require revealing in order for the project to work successfully. Then, in turn, writers or critics like Ropitini reflect on their own childhoods, gaining agency as they reflect on the project. In this way, the project has a ripple effect that could be infinite. Ironically, an insider viewpoint becomes something with agency, empowering a great many participants, audiences, critics, reviewers and readers and so on.



Figure 36. Amituanai, E. (2017). Kavana Ioane, 'Sione swimming staunch'. [Photograph]. Pantograph Punch. <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/review-keepnkimiora>

Brownson employs the new term, participatory photography, writing: “Such is the innovation that Edith Amituanai has brought to her mentoring collaboration. An equally relevant strategy to this participatory documentary photography is the artist's belief that ‘everyone knows what they want to say’” (MacKinnon, 2018:13). In this sense, Brownson talks about Amituanai’s “visual strategy [as] conceptually incisive and is one of participatory mentoring; simply because it reverses roles between photographer and subject” (MacKinnon, 2018:13).

Brownson points out that the children are not simply learning to be artist photographers, meaning that they are not reversing roles with Edith. They are learning from each other, becoming “each other’s models”. Brownson continues to say that this is “a relational activity where the creative empowerment shared by the artist follows a whanaungatanga relationship with the school and its pupils” (MacKinnon, 2018:13). This constitutes a break in hierarchical relationship between artist and participants, prompting Brownson to call this ‘participatory photography’ rather than any kind of documentary photography (MacKinnon, 2018:13).

The emic and autoethnographic viewpoint is realised through the four photo methods being applied through the kid's participation photography. The children are invited to participate "in four photo processes: to look at themselves, to look at each other, to look at their school and to look at their home community" (MacKinnon, 2018:13; quoting Brownson). The process 'to look' at themselves, each other, their school, their home community, focuses on the childrens' understanding of their culture; a self-assessment of who they are. In a way this perspective driven photography becomes autoethnography photography where the photographs are taken from the perspective of the subject, the subject investigates their own perspectives of themselves which gives an authentic emic viewpoint.

Brownson even goes as far as to say that this is the first time a New Zealand photographer has invited subjects to photograph in this way, and points of this project as being ground breaking and extending the potential of contemporary New Zealand photography. He writes:

The resulting images are really a visual confirmation of what they experienced as a group of students who learnt photography together in a safe and supportive environment. Their images open a doorway into the lives of young New Zealanders; the like of which have not really been seen before. (MacKinnon, 2018:11)

The students were able to realise the mission statement of their school through their co-operative art project: "Every child at Kimi Ora is a leader. We are empowering our school community to take the lead in their lives, to follow their dreams and passions and to give the best of themselves everyday (MacKinnon et al., 2018:11; quoting Brownson)." "Also, the assignment will serve as a visual marker showing how they were a cohort, a school team based around spending time with an artist so as to see their lives at school and sometimes afterwards, together (MacKinnon, 2018:11; quoting Brownson)."



Figure 37. Amituanai, E. (2017). *Ati Tuliau (Year 6), 'New World'*. [Photograph]. Pantograph Punch. <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/review-keepnkimiora>

What I find interesting about this project is the talanoa that is done before the project is even proposed. This is to discuss the importance of what happens in the initial stages before a project begins to be realised. In this respect, nothing is outside of the project itself. Processes before, during and after become integrated into what could possibly be called the ‘final’ project. As already noted, Brownson uses the Māori term whanaungatanga: “relationship, kinship, sense of family connection” (Māori Dictionary, n.d.), which usually begins with creating a relationship with the community engaged with.

Brownson’s comments echo the kinds of talanoa discussed in Chapter 1 such as, talanoa that “navigates relationships as a critical relational orality” (Tecun 2018:162). This relates to first encounter talanoa between Edith Amituanai and the kids of Kimi Ora that forms a connection. This relational mindful approach creates a deeper understanding of each other: the kid’s whakapapa that extends to their whānau even continues further beyond the Flaxmere boundaries. Equally, the kids receive a deeper understanding of Edith as a person and her whakapapa. Talanoa is what I describe as a ‘lived research experience’ where these encounters between Edith and the kids teach and learn from each other as the project progresses. These shared experiences further an understanding of relationships across generations and communities.

Janet Lilo: *Right of Way*

To look into one's living area, you must immerse yourself into the culture to really understand the mechanics of how our society works. In Janet Lilo's installation *Right of Way*, commissioned for the 5th Auckland Triennial, you get the sense of that; she is viewing her community from within (see Vea, 2015:9; see also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013). This is similar to Brownson's reference to whanaungatanga as creating a relationship with the community. When you walk into Lilo's installation, she takes you right into her neighbourhood in Avondale, with her large-scale images overtaking the walls of the Artspace gallery, which gives you a sense of being somewhere else, other than the gallery (see Vea, 2015:9; see also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013). This echoes the work of Amituanai, discussed above, as it empowers a seeing or perspective into Lilo's neighbourhood. It is similar to how Ropitini talks about growing up in Flaxmere and seeing himself in Amituanai's images; as a young boy seeing himself through the kids' photography.



Figure 38. Lilo, J. (2013). *Right of Way*. [Installation]. 5th Auckland Triennial. Artspace Aotearoa. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://janetlilo.com/2013/08/25/right-of-way-2013-documentation/>

Lilo's photographs are constructed from standard 6x4 images you get from the usual photo print shops. Each 6x4 image is a tile used to form a very large-scale single, yet immersive image, a photo montage of roofs, fences and everyday suburban objects taken from Lilo's viewpoint of her driveway. A key part of the artwork is Lilo's video and sound installation collected from her community, moving images and sounds of people, music, ambience and diverse spoken dialects in her neighbourhood, which evidences the multiculturalism in her local suburb (see Vea, 2015:9; see also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013).



Figure 39. Lilo, J. (2013). *Right of Way*. [Installation]. 5th Auckland Triennial. Artspace Aotearoa. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://janetlilo.com/2013/08/25/right-of-way-2013-documentation/>

The design of the project includes an analysis of relevant contemporary practitioners: To be more specific, Lilo's *Right of Way* is built on visual and audio material collected by herself, and from her driveway as a site between an interior and exterior, giving Lilo's perspective from inside her place looking outside (see Vea, 2015:10; see also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013). As with Amituanai's artwork exploring self-assessment as a form of autoethnography photography, this is one of the key aspects of a greater autoethnography that I am interested in for my research project; the terms and conditions of the emic and etic are apparent in Lilo's installation. In Lilo's case her perspective is through the emic sense in that information has been gathered from inside the culture she comes from and participates in (see Vea, 2015:10; see also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013).

Kalisolaite ‘Uhila: *Mo‘ui Tukuhausia*

The emic viewpoint is also evident in local Tongan/New Zealand artist Kalisolaite ‘Uhila with his work *Mo‘ui Tukuhausia* (2012 & 2015). ‘Uhila was part of a group exhibition entitled, *What do you mean, we?* which took place at Te Tuhi gallery in Pakuranga in 2012 (see Vea, 2015:11; see Phillips, 2012a). In this version of “*Mo‘ui Tukuhausia* ‘Uhila lived homelessly around the art gallery, Te Tuhi’s buildings and the surrounding areas for the duration of two weeks. After living homelessly for two weeks, ‘Uhila and the curator of the exhibition, Bruce E. Phillips, had a conversation about ‘Uhila’s homeless living experience. In the conversation, ‘Uhila mentions, he crossed paths with a local homeless person during his endeavour. ‘Uhila explained to the homeless person about his experiment of living homeless as an artwork. The homeless person acknowledged what ‘Uhila was doing and in his own words, he says, “Bro, I am glad you are doing that, man, it is good that someone is doing this to understand us better” (see Vea, 2015:11; see Phillips, 2012b:48). If Brownson calls Amituanai’s artwork a form of ‘participatory photography’ (citing MacKinnon, 2018:13) that constitutes a break in hierarchical relationship between artist and participants, then ‘Uhila’s work responds to participatory performance encounters in a similar but different way. In a way, the homeless person recognises how the emic viewpoint is important to understand a culture, which the artwork *‘Mo‘ui Tukuhausia* and its processes are about. ‘Uhila delves inside the culture of being homeless; his viewpoint from being homeless also gives an etic response from the outsiders of homeless culture (see Vea:11; see Phillips, 2012b:48).⁷

⁷ This artwork by Kalisolaite ‘Uhila is also discussed in the co-authored article, *Moana Nui Social Art Practices in Aotearoa* (2018), DAT Journal, 3(2), 291-324. <https://doi.org/10.29147/dat.v3i2.95> . This is attached in the appendix.



Figure 40. 'Uhila, K. (2012). *Mo 'ui Tukuhausia*, (documentation). [Live Performance]. Te Tuhi. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://tetuhi.art/exhibition/what-do-you-mean-we/>

This artwork by 'Uhila also poses certain problems (already touched upon in Chapter 1) in terms of the way in which I am positioning the significance of an emic viewpoint in that 'Uhila is not in reality homeless; he is playing the role of homelessness for the purpose of the artwork. While this has striking significance, it could be seen as a temporary emic viewpoint opposition. This is interesting because the discussion could be applied from various perspectives. 'Uhila shows sympathy and acute immersive understanding of his fellow Pacific peoples, but the art event and context plays a part in removing to some degree his so-called genuine involvement. This has to perhaps remain a question rather than a statement, because we will never truly understand 'Uhila's personal involvement.



Figure 41. 'Uhila, K. (2012). *Mo 'ui Tukuhausia*. [Live Performance]. Te Tuhi. Auckland, New Zealand.
<https://bruceephillips.com/writing/discussing-moui-tukuhausia>

In this respect, one could argue that 'Uhila's artwork creates a form of social discussion about homelessness that is an extension of the talanoa process. A question of the artist's own identity as homeless, or not, may become less significant within this extended cultural discussion. This discussion touches on the ideas of Manulani Meyer about differences between knowing and doing and lived research experience through Pacific collectives (further discussed in Chapter 3 *Limbo/Pasifika Edgewalkers*) (The Kohala Center, 2009). Meyer discusses the idea of learning through doing which I will interpret as a relational *process* in social and cultural exchanges. Within the histories of contemporary performance art various terms have been employed that emphasise processes of engagement. Christopher Braddock refers to the way art historian Amelia Jones explores a contingency of enactment which marks an interdependence between artist, subject and audience, all "contingent on the *process* of enactment" (Braddock 2013:35-6; see Jones 1998:10). In this respect, processes of performance and engagement become more important than any predetermined idea conceived of by an individual artist. As Braddock writes, "the process of performance takes precedence over appearance" (2013:17).

It is not in the scope of this exegesis to make an analysis of how my discussions about talanoa relate to histories of performance art in Euro-American practice and theory. My approach here is to bring into sharp focus particular Pacific terms and practices. Amituanai, Lilo and 'Uhila could be said to all embody aspects of those co-called western performance histories but they instigate them through their own profound cultural positions. A secondary concern might be to relate these terms to broader more Western forms of art theory but this is not my focus. This is to reiterate that my primary concern is for Indigenous terms and writers rather than constantly contextualising within mainstream Western canons of thought. Amituanai, Lilo and 'Uhila all explore key Pacific concerns such as perspective into our neighbourhoods, questioning of hierarchical relationship between artist and participants resulting in participatory photography and performance, mentoring collaboration and participatory mentoring, exploring self-assessment as a form of autoethnography, and whanaungatanga as creating a relationship with the community.

Chapter 3 Limbo/Pasifika Edgewalkers

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this chapter discusses the notion of limbo and ‘Pasifika edgewalker’ as a liminal perspective or site which, in the social sciences, is sometimes considered as being displaced, but I prefer to see these viewpoints and sites as places of belonging: as a complex way of being between *tamas‘i muli* (boy foreigner) in Tonga and islander here in Aotearoa, thus realising the privilege of being in limbo. There are several points I discuss in regards to the limbo/Pasifika edgewalker position, which leads onto lived research experiences through Pacific collectives. The chapter begins with my upbringing in Aotearoa and the ‘anga fakatonga’ culture experienced through my *ongo mātu‘a* (parents) who migrated here from Tonga. I negotiate between the two cultures, where I establish a place to belong and I compare this to being in limbo.

In the following section, I relate this to Anne-Marie Tupuola’s term ‘Pasifika edgewalkers’ in relation to being in limbo, which helps me locate myself within this sense of dislocation. This Pasifika edgewalker status will be discussed further in relation to *fonua*, where I find myself and my family in a dislocated sense of limbo in relation to land and property ownership’s and therefore a sense of belonging. What follows next concerns how youth participants expressed their differing views through their art practice and I refer back to the art performance *One Kiosk many Exchanges* and discuss where the participants choose the limbo/Pasifika edgewalker margins to establish their art practice. I extend this discussion of Pasifika edgewalkers, exploring the importance of positioning ourselves as researchers, arts managers and curators that champion our own knowledge systems.

I then discussed an account of working at the Pepsico Bluebird chip factory in the summer breaks and how this influenced the art installation *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me* (2018). I relate this to limbo lived experiences as an academic (during semester) and a factory worker (in the semester breaks). In this context, I try to interpret these lived experiences as metaphorical movements, accentuating these acts into a durational performance. I refer to artist Darcell Apelu’s metaphorical movements used in durational performances derived from lived experiences in her performance to video artwork *Slap* (2012). I discuss *Slap* in relation to the notions of limbo and Pasifika edgewalker given that Apelu is of Niuean and European descent, and I also refer to the effects of a *tatau* within her family. Here, I refer to another limbo/Pasifika edgewalker artist Matavai Taulangau, discussing his video works that deal with gaining knowledge through lived experiences of his Tongan community in Kaikohe and how he negotiates these experiences through practice and applies them to himself as a Tongan living in Auckland. I relate his lived research experiences to Manulani Aluli Meyer’s talk on “‘Ike ‘Āina: Sustainability in the Context of Hawaiian Epistemology” where she discusses the differences between “knowledge gained by thinking and deliberation” and “knowing gained by experience,” (The Kohala Center, 2009) arguing for the latter’s significance to the ancient Polynesian pedagogy still valued by Pacific peoples today (The Kohala Center, 2009). This

discussion is extended to the ‘lived research experience’ through talanoa with collectives as a key epistemological approach to this practice led thesis. I understand an epistemological approach to relate to the study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. Our histories and our limitations are often understood through elaborative experiences that acknowledge differences from generalised mainstream understandings. I reflect on other organised Pacific collectives that work in similar environments, working in response to issues involving working class and migrants in Aotearoa in relation to the limbo/Pasifika edgewalker.

It begins with the state of Pasifika edgewalkers

As a child living in Aotearoa, both my parents migrated here from Tonga in the 1980s. I realised on my first day of primary school that I had 2 cultures to relate to. Until that day, the only one I really knew was ‘anga fakatonga’; the Tongan culture and subsequent upbringing my parents gave me, even whilst living in Aotearoa. Ironically, the second culture that influenced me has become a home away from Tonga. As one of many Pacific kids at school, we were often called Islanders by Māori, Palangi children and teachers. The term Islanders referred to people who were from the Pacific Islands living in Aotearoa. It was used to suggest we were outsiders. As I heard it said: “you’re Tongan Islander, you’re not from here (Aotearoa)”. My first time visiting my parents’ homeland Tonga, I had a similar experience with family and locals calling me *tamasi’i muli*, which translates to boy-foreigner or alien. This was my experience of growing up, the result of others positioning us in a displaced culture. I didn’t care for these dislocated terms, but as kids we thought it was normal: being called outsiders and not being part of this place, or part of any place; Aotearoa or Tonga, or anywhere else.

Recently I have compared this to being in limbo, but not the common sense of the word - lost and chaotic – but one that creates an ability to be *in* limbo and has created a perspective of looking at two cultures from a medium point of view. The word medium can also refer to a person claiming to be in contact with the spirits of the dead and able to communicate between the dead and the living. In my case, returning back to Chapter 1, talanoa can access past memories with family members that have passed such as my grandfather Sione Kafoa. This does not have to activate the realm of spirit mediums, but is more in a zone of drawn-out talanoa that activates memories like a time machine that, as said in Chapter 1, might manifest after hours; after business or after work.

In another sense, I have two living places or cultures and I negotiate between the two from the limbo perspective. I don't mean that I travel regularly back and forth between Tonga and Aotearoa, but that I travel more between anga fakatonga and other cultures within Aotearoa. The term limbo originated from the Latin word 'limbus', meaning edge. Medieval Christian belief had it that only those who were baptized into the Christian church could enter heaven. Therefore, limbo was on the border, not in hell, but not in heaven either. These days, it has become a metaphor and physical state of not belonging to a place or being in between places (Potter, n.d.).

In the next section, Anne-Marie Tupuola's term Pasifika edgewalkers, offers some useful discussion in relation to transient cultures and fusions of cultures which express new ethnic identities for Pasifika. This helps me locate myself within this sense of dislocation, or a place and time of limbo.

Pasifika Edgewalker: Anne-Marie Tupuola

Tupuola uses the term Pasifika edgewalkers as she tries to make some sense of the way second and third generation youth of Pacific descent living in Aotearoa/New Zealand achieve identity status, or if they realise a status at all (2004:87). She situates diaspora in referring to "a mix or fusion of cultures which expressed new ethnic identities which cut across... class, region, age, gender and sexuality" (2004:87).

As Tupuola indicates in her research, most young 2nd to 4th generation woman of Samoan descent born in Aotearoa in their teens refuted the ethnic label New Zealand born Samoan arguing that it dangerously essentialised and homogenised youth of Samoan ancestry in New Zealand (2004:87). As said, these sentiments echo my experience with identity dislocation being labelled outsider from both my Tongan and Aotearoan community.

Debunking Pacific identity as singularly New Zealand Samoan, the young Samoan women participants in Tupuola's research were able to weave within and between multiple cultures with relative ease (Tupuola 2004:88).⁸ This is an example of the limbo perspective mentioned earlier, of having two living places or cultures that require negotiation. In the artwork *One Kiosk Many Exchanges* (2016) the participants were able to access both their Pacific culture through their parents' experiences and memories while also reflecting on their own experiences living in Aotearoa.

⁸ This is similar to Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey's book *Routes and Roots, Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* where she explores how island writers negotiate complex relationships between what she calls routes and roots. Her work traverses diaspora and Indigenous studies, facilitating broader discussions between these disciplines (DeLoughrey 2007).

Tupuola explores three distinct categories: those born in the islands, those born in Aotearoa and those with dual (Aotearoa and Pacific) identities. In the performance artwork *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* discussed earlier in Talanoa Usu 1, most of the participants fall in the ‘born in Aotearoa category’, and Sione Mafi is the only participant born in the Tonga. From this perspective, Tupuola discusses a range of cross-cultural models of identity that include how minority groups establish identity and how biracial identity can move away from forms of racial exclusivity (2004:88-9). However, referring to Tracy Robinson, Tupuola argues that models of fixed identity can risk negating other less visible yet significant parts of self-definition (Robinson, 1999:85; in Tupuola 2004:89). In this context, Tupuola embraces more transient and shifting roles of so-called ‘minority’ cultures.

The term ‘edgewalkers’ is borrowed from Nina Krebs, a psychologist who wrote a book titled with the same name. Tupuola defines edgewalker with reference to Krebs where she describes it as youths with multiple ethnic or cultural worlds. Krebs states edgewalkers are resilient to cultural shifts and embrace their cultural complexity while engaging in the general public (Tupuola 2004:90; paraphrasing Krebs 1999:9).

Tupuola refers to her ethnic and cultural background playing a vital role in being able to weave between her roles as insider and outsider researcher (2004:91). This emphasises the importance of the emic (inside) and etic (outside) perspective of a researcher who can access the culture being researched, because they come from that cultural background. As cited in Chapter 1, this might be similar to what David Fa’avae experiences when he writes, “looking from the outside as an insider means I am more able than outsiders to explain my research participants to other outsiders” (2016:139). Here, Fa’avae he is describing something of a limbo in between cultural experience. And weaving between roles as insider and outsider researcher also resonates with the emic perspective in Edith Amituanai’s artwork *Keeping on Kimi Ora* (2018) discussed in Chapter 2 where she surrendered her camera to the kids of Kimi Ora and they took pictures from insiders’ perspective of their community.

Tupuola discusses how the youth participants expressed their differing views through “poetry, graffiti, spoken word and art, symptomatic of the way many youths are choosing to express themselves and their identities” (2004:93). She emphasises a poem by Taiyo Takeda Ebato titled *Setting Leaves Afire* (2001) that “captures the transient journey of diasporic communities as well as the shifts that take place between memory and reality, the imaginary world and lived experiences” (Tupuola 2004:93). These transient shifts between memories and realities are similar to what I described as like a time machine; where I can revisit the talanoa I have had in the past with passed relatives and the realities can refer to the current or present where the memories are relived. This also refers to establishing a place from a dislocation, the transient shifts between places of birth to places of your parents’ birth, culture, traditions and language.

Tupuola summarises her article by questioning the relevance of terms such as ‘Indigenous’ and ‘native’ for Pasifika youth diaspora in Aotearoa when they are in fact experiencing transient and multiple identities. From this perspective, I question art practices and their contextualisation that reinforce rigid parameters. Tupuola argues that “youth are crossing between cultures and adopting identifications far removed from their genealogy and local geography” (2004:96). In this respect, I follow her suggestion to adopt research methods based on current cultural experiences, hence my participatory and collective models of art practice that engage with youth and contemporary issues. Tupuola also suggests that researching outside local cultural contexts is useful as it highlights youth who “share very similar experiences and articulate their realities in a similar fashion” (2004:96). In this way, the artworks developed for the 2017 Honolulu Biennial relate to how my experiences with Fonua/‘Āina is perceived in Tonga and Aotearoa, shared with the people of Hawaii.

Art from the Limbo/Pasifika edgewalker margins

This chapter takes Tupuola’s idea of Pasifika edgewalkers, as moving beyond rigid, sometimes traditional, Pacific categorisation towards more transient and multiple identities. I return to an artwork already discussed in Talanoa Usu 1, but this time I discuss *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016) in the context of the notion of Pasifika edgewalkers. Looking at the artists involved, I explore how they negotiate their culture, inherited from their parents, with their Aoteroan one in the limbo perspective.

The artwork *One Kiosk many Exchanges* evokes a state of limbo, even tamasi’i muli (foreigner or alien) in one’s own land due to the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and economic rationalism. The artwork involves artists who I consider as Pasifika edgewalkers who negotiate their Pacific culture with their Aoteroan one from the limbo perspective.

As mentioned earlier in Talanoa Usu 1, these participants whether deliberately or not, choose the limbo/Pasifika edgewalker margins to establish their art practice. As with Tupuola’s argument, they embrace more transient and shifting roles of so-called ‘minority’ cultures. Jimmy Wulf, who is raised in his fa’a samoa (samoan culture) in Aotearoa with unfamiliar German ancestry, embeds his limbo/Pasifika edgewalker negotiating with the three cultures. He deliberately spoke in broken German to old photographs of German relatives he has never met. Valasi Leota-Seiuli’s limbo/Pasifika edgewalker position is established between her Aoteroan upbringing and her limited fa’a samoa through her family’s lived experiences and memories. Exploring her father’s experience of growing up during the dawn raids, she recited her song inside a closet in Samoan, self-conscious of her mistakes in her so-called Indigenous language. Following Tupuola’s argument, she might resist both the terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘native’ when exploring her identity within the Pacific diaspora of Aotearoa. Newman Tumata explores his limbo/Pasifika edgewalker negotiating his dominant Aoteroan

upbringing and his street-smart Niuean culture filtered from his older siblings' lived experiences in the 1990s. In designing his posters, he used insignia that only people of his minority urban group would understand. Sione Mafi differs from the other three as he is the only one born outside Aotearoa. His limbo/Pasifika edgewalker position is rooted through his Tongan upbringing and his lived experiences adapting to Aotearoa. Using graffiti on taro plants found in the public library gardens was an attempt to explore his experiences of racial exclusivity. The four participants' art practices are based on current cultural experiences established from the limbo/Pasifika edgewalker position. They look to transient shifts between lived memories and realities accessed through talanoa with family members and embrace their cultural complexity while engaging through their art with the general public.



Figure 42. Wulf, J. (2016). *Talanoa with my German ancestors*. [Live Performance]. Year 3 BVA group critique, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand.

How does agonism come into the limbo perspective?

From this perspective, Chapter 4 explores Chantal Mouffe's ideas of artistic activism and agonistic sites of shared cooperation that shares common ground with the idea of researchers as Pasifika edgewalkers. A state of limbo seems to align with Mouffe's insistence for political practices that create "agonistic public spaces" that avoid all forms of consensus. But how do we engage in forms of adversarial democratic politics while being committed to talanoa?

Limbo/Pasifika Edgewalkers as the builders

In 2016, I was involved in a panel discussion for the *Circuit Symposium: Phantom Topologies* with Nina Tonga, Paul Janman and chaired by Mark Amery. The topic was responding to a text that Mark Amery had written '*Building Better Roads*' (2016)⁹, critiquing New Zealand's leading role in contemporary Pacific art and its lack of activity in the Pacific region. The panel discussion was only brief, but I left the conversation pondering on the term '*Building Better Roads*' that Mark had alluded to. In my view, before we even lay the foundation to building these roads, I think what is necessary, is finding the right builders; builders who share the same ideologies as that culture, have a link through heritage to that culture and have a proper understanding of that culture.



Figure 43. (2016). *Building Better Roads* panel discussion with Nina Tonga, Paul Janman, John Vea and chaired by Mark Amery. Circuit Symposium: Phantom Topologies. Wellington City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand.

As Pasifika edgewalkers living in Aotearoa, it is important to position ourselves as researchers, arts managers and curators that champion our own knowledge systems from our lived research experience. These are people like Kolokesa Mahina Tuai, Project Curator in the Pacific Collection at the Auckland Museum, Sean Mallon and Nina Tonga who are Curators of Pacific Cultures at Te Papa Museum and Ane Tonga who is Pacific Curator at the Toi o Tamaki Auckland Art Gallery. They are leading examples of having the right people from Pacific cultures. They enjoy the privilege of making decisions reflecting their emic upbringing. Of course, the artists and collectives I discussed in this chapter are equally important Pacific builders.

⁹ To access the article *Building Better Roads* by Mark Amery, go in this link: <https://www.thebigidea.nz/stories/building-better-roads>

you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me (2018)

Talanoa's emic (inside) viewpoint, gathering information from the inside of a society, comes with a tacit understanding that this is a flawed process, which develops subjectivities within a cultural state of limbo. A story comes to light within a story being gathered and the idea of a story-within-a-story is common to my research. What follows is an account of working at the Pepsico Bluebird chip factory in the summer breaks which influenced an art installation. This relates to limbo lived experiences as an academic and a factory worker.

Every summer break from university, I register myself into a temping agency for work to keep up with the cost of living. This habit started at an early age. As kids living in Herne Bay in the late 1980s, we were exposed to factory work very young. As said in the Preface, during our school holidays, my parents couldn't afford babysitters or holiday programmes, so we tagged along with our parents/uncles/aunties to their work places.

The temping agency I enrolled into generally contracts work for factory industrial jobs, with minimal variation of mundane repetitive activities for 8-plus hours a day, five to six days a week. During that summer break in 2017/18, I worked at a potato chip plant, where my role was to cut potatoes and lookout for foreign objects.

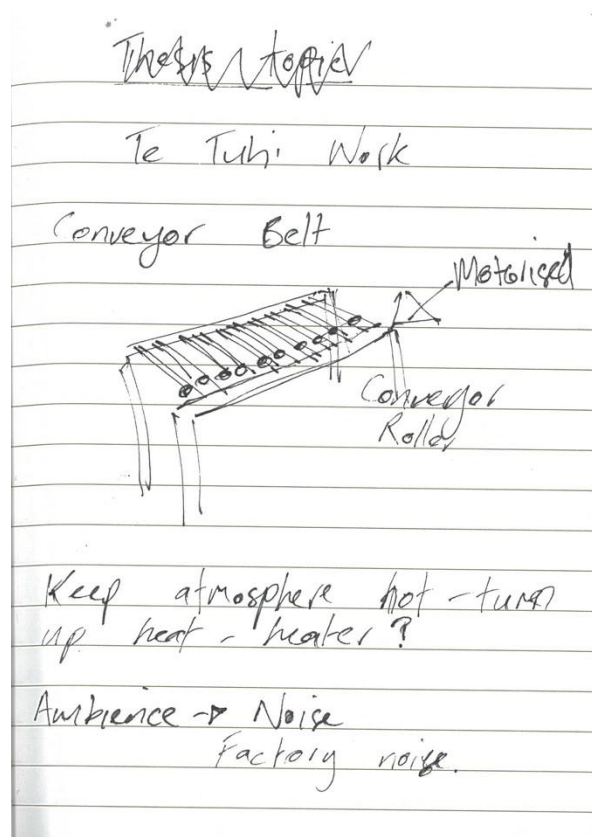


Figure 44. (2018). Research drawings on my break at work, Pepsico Bluebird.

My first day on the job, the chip line wasn't running due to technical issues, so I was re-assigned to do some repackaging with some other temps that were also from a tertiary institution. A Samoan worker who worked at the potato chip plant for 30-plus years oversaw the repackaging station. She was in her late fifties and introduced herself in Samoan thinking we were all Samoan. I responded to her introduction, respectfully correcting her: "Hi my name is John and I'm Tongan." To my surprise she replied in perfect Tongan pronunciation, "Malo 'e lelei Sione." The worker appointed us tasks in the repackaging station. She shared her history with the potato chip plant. We all listened, simultaneously focusing on the repackaging task. She concluded her talanoa with a cautionary advice: "You kids only experience this for a moment, don't be here for life like me."

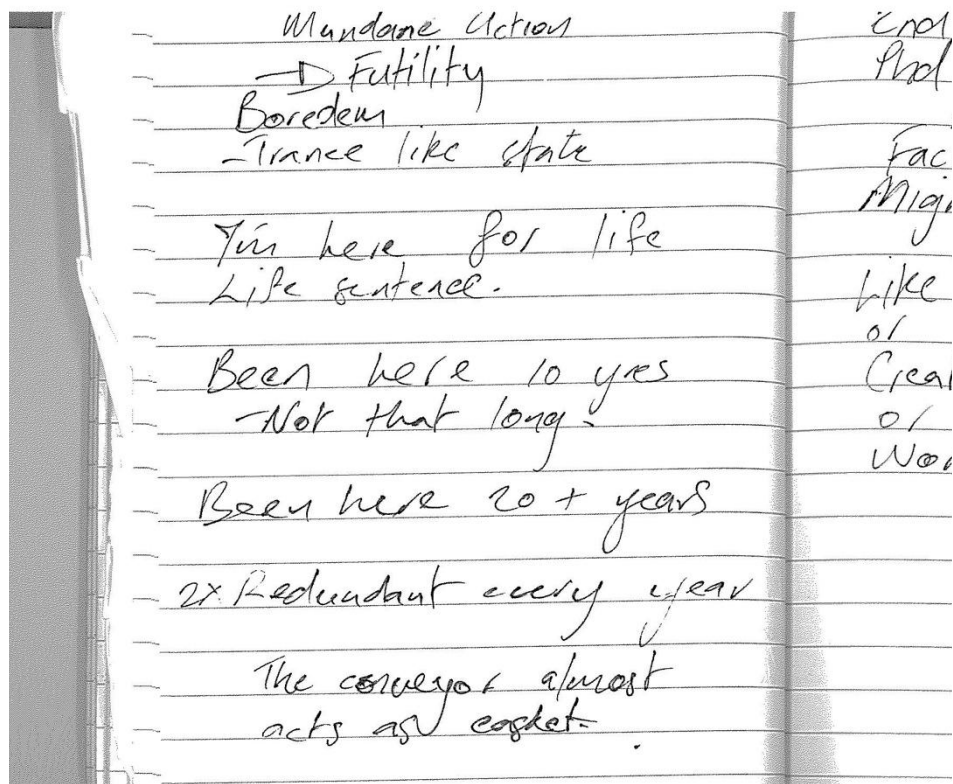


Figure 45. (2018). Research drawings on my break at work, Pepsico Bluebird.

She reminded me of my parents, who would often say the same thing: “Don’t be like us!”, referring to not following the same career path as them. I guess that advice had not connected with me as I always end up working at these types of jobs. It’s not so much the work that attracts me, it’s the people in it, or as the Samoan worker alluded to, “the people in it for life.” They are the ones that keep me grounded, keep me humble and influence how I approach my artistic research and thinking.



Figure 46. (2018). *Research drawings on my break at work, PepsiCo Bluebird.*

The work on the chip line was very tedious. We wore food safety gear and earmuffs for hearing protection. The ambience of the factory was very hot with loud machinery noise. Often there would only be two of us working on the trim table. Potatoes would go through the conveyor belt and get washed, then on to the conveyor rollers for us to inspect. We cut the oversized potatoes in half and got rid of the bad ones. We did this for eight hours a day, Monday to Friday. The other person on the trim table had also been at the chip plant for 30-plus years.



Figure 47. (2018). *Television tuned to Aljazeera*. Smoko room, Pepsico Bluebird. Wiri, Auckland, New Zealand.

At the start of every day, we welcome each other at the trim table with hand gestures and facial expressions. We stand there every day staring downwards at the potatoes. We look at each other now and then to check on each other's sanity, with a simple thumbs up gesture and a quick smile, then our eyes go back downwards to the rolling potatoes. Behind is a clock which we try our best not to look at as time goes slow every time we do. Keeping myself distracted from the clock and from going insane, I developed a habit: I sang to myself, recited readings to myself, and even had full-on conversations with myself till my break. In the cafeteria, the television is always tuned to the Aljazeera news network – as if an individual is trying to stay conscious, or keep everyone else conscious, a counter to the tedious mind-numbing activities we do in the factory.

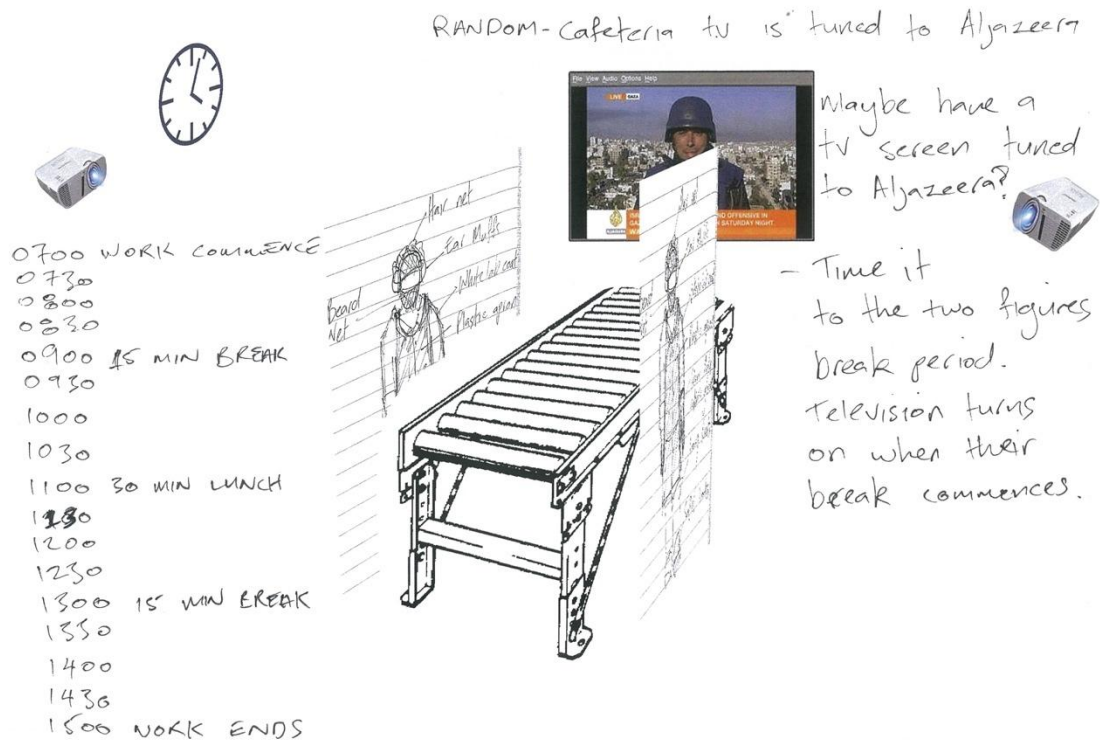


Figure 48. (2018). Mock up diagram for the installation at Te Tuhi.

Te Tuhi installation

At the entrance of the installation, you come across PVC curtains which are similar to the ones at the food production plant which creates a barrier against dust, heat and smoke while still allowing access. We made our curtains out of a large PVC film sheet we bought from the Para Rubber store and cut the sheet into strips to imitate the factory curtains. When you walk through the curtains, you either experience one of two different components which depends on the time you enter the installation.



Figure 49. Veia, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

One of the components is a simulated factory atmosphere. In the middle of the small blacked out gallery is an active conveyor roller with potatoes cast out of plaster rolling along the conveyor, accompanied by loud factory sounds. Two male figures that are rear projected onto a screen that is transparent gives a holographic feel and are positioned on both sides of the conveyor table facing each other. At the beginning of this component of the installation, on the projected screen the two figures walk into view. They put on their specialised food safety equipment, acknowledge each other and they go into their work. They gaze down onto the conveyor table, ready to inspect the plaster potatoes on the rollers. With every hour passed you see the two figures look up at one another, give a nod with a thumbs up, then they proceed to their monotonous inspection work. Every now and then, they break their tedious gaze and check the clock on the wall, as if they are waiting for something.



Figure 50. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me.* [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

These gestures emphasised in this installation point out some of the lived experiences I've had while working at this production plant. The talanoa with hand gestures and facial expressions at the trim table relate to my approach with how I obtain these mundane movements and using it in my art practice. I define these actions as metaphorical movements, accentuating these acts into a durational performance to video art installation.



Figure 51. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

The two projected figures in the installation are myself and artist Matavai Taulangau,¹⁰ who I will discuss later on in this chapter. The gestures of acknowledgement of each other every passing hour, constant eyeing of the clock and the thumbs up to one another to see whether we are doing ok visually demonstrates boredom and fatigue. This was a conscious effort to give the audience an insight of what factory life might be like.

¹⁰ Matavai Taulangau, who I've often worked with because our similarities in our upbringing and as artists we often work at factory jobs to sustain our living. At the time he was working at a packaging company called Oji Fibre Solutions, formerly known as Carter Holt Harvey, where most Pacific families living in Auckland would have someone working there or known someone that had worked there.



Figure 52. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me.* [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Metaphorical movements also include the movements of objects. The plaster potatoes rolling on the conveyor table eventually deteriorate with the movement of the roller. This accidental occurrence resonates with the Samoan worker who has worked at this food production for years, and her body has acclimatised to the impacts of the laborious activities. This reflects the effects of factory work on families. In this respect, I refer back to the Preface where I talk about my parents, uncles and aunties being two different people at home compared to how they were in their workplace; coming home fatigued from working long hours at their jobs and then having a different energy at home.

As mentioned earlier there is one of two different components which depends on the time you enter the installation. The other component comes alive when everything in the place shuts down: the conveyor roller turns off, the two figures walk out of view and the factory noises stop. Everything is dark but the clock which is still lit by a spotlight, and mounted on the wall is a flat screen monitor that turns on routinely tuned to the live Aljazeera News. These alternative components are timed to my day shift hours at the Pepsico Bluebird factory. Below is a timeline of how the art installation *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*, would run during the exhibition:

| | | |
|------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| First component | 08:00 - 10:00 | Work at trim table |
| Second component | 10:00 - 10:15 | Morning 15 min break |
| First component | 10:15 – 12:00 | Work at trim table |
| Second component | 12:00 - 12:30 | 30 min lunch |
| First component | 12:30 - 15:00 | Work at trim table |
| Second component | 15:00 - 15:15 | Afternoon 15 min break |
| First component | 15:15 - 16:00 | Work at trim table |



Figure 53. Veja, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Lived Research Experiences as Performance

Artist Darcell Apelu's art practice comes to mind when you think of metaphorical movements used in durational performances derived from lived experiences. Apelu often uses her body and specific movements in her art practice; she creates these powerful performance artworks through a simple mundane act and accentuates these movements using time and stamina. From Niuean and European descent, her "practice regularly critiques the representation and role of women within a Pacific framework" (Lopesi & Afoa, 2015). Apelu often uses her lived experiences as a competitive wood chopper in her performances. This was the case for her woodchopping performance I personally experienced at Artspace Aotearoa titled: *New Zealand Axeman's Association: Women's Sub Committee President* (2014).



Figure 54. Apelu, D. (2012). *Slap*, still image. [Video]. <https://transoceanicvisualexchange.com/artists/aotearoa/>

In Apelu's performance to video artwork *Slap* (2012), she appears on the screen sitting with her back facing towards the viewer. The upper half of her body is exposed, which has a tatau (tattoo) between her shoulder blades, and her lower body is covered by a sarong. At first you think this video is a still image until someone comes from the left of the screen and slaps Apelu's tatau on her back once and exits the screen. The slap was only a brief action, but her back starts to welt with the handprint of the slapper where her tatau sits, which is evidence that a slap leaves a longer impression than the action of the slap. This work is a response to some of her family disapproving of her tatau. Apelu wanted to reflect this using an action to show the disapproval. The term 'slap' is an action often used as a metaphor, when one is confronted and insulted verbally by another, one would respond as if he/she has been slapped in the face. Apelu literally uses the term slap in the action sense, and the after effect of the action of the slap visually becomes a temporary tatau (see Vea, 2015:24; see also Circuit, 2012).

In a way, Apelu wears the slap with pride with the same reverence as her actual tatau. Apelu is perhaps a good example of Tupuola's edgewalkers who become skilled at negotiating different living places and cultures. Paraphrasing the words of Tupuola, Apelu is resilient to cultural shifts such as extended family resistance to her tatau, embracing her family's cultural complexity while engaging with the general public through her art practice. Of course, there are further symbolic readings of the slap as referring to the after effects of abuse, which last much longer after the initial abuse, be it racial, emotional, sexual and so on. It also refers to the comic term slap-stick, using humour as a vehicle for saying something else other than what appears to be being said. It is also used as a device to create distance from what is really being communicated by the work.

By comparison, the use of metaphorical movements is identifiable in my own art practice. The people I talanoa with on the factory floor or work places are indirectly choreographed as metaphorical movements into my art performances. The following is an insight into Matavai Taulangau's video works that deal with gaining knowledge through lived experiences of his Tongan community in Kaikohe and how he negotiates these experiences through his art practice and applies it to himself as a Tongan living in Auckland. From the perspective of Tupuola's edgewalkers, it seems like a mixture of an imaginary past Tongan world and lived experiences in Aotearoa.

Reconnecting to culture through lived experiences fonua, Matavai Taulangau

“Show your knowledge of surfing where, in the water! No just say you surf brah! Forget it!”
(The Kohala Center, 2009)

In her seminar “‘Ike ‘Āina: Sustainability in the Context of Hawaiian Epistemology,” Manulani Aluli Meyer discusses the differences between “knowledge gained by thinking and deliberation” and “knowing gained by experience,” arguing for the latter’s significance to the ancient Polynesian pedagogy still valued by Pacific peoples today (The Kohala Center, 2009). Even though Meyer’s research is filtered through Hawaiian Indigenous epistemology, aspects of this epistemology might be applied to a Tongan understanding of the world. It is present, for instance, in the works of Matavai Taulangau. The title of Meyer’s seminar “‘Ike ‘Āina,” which translates to “learning through the land,” relates to Matavai’s method to reconnecting with his Tongan culture by making a connection to the *fonua* (land) he grew up in (The Kohala Center, 2009).

For his exhibition *Ma’u Pe Kai*, Matavai documented his experiences harvesting kumala in his hometown Kaikohe, Northland. A three-hour drive north from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, where the artist lives, Kaikohe provides Matavai with a place of familiarity—a place to return when feeling *ta’elata* (homesick). Matavai’s desire to reconnect with his Tongan culture motivates his work. He regularly returns home to Kaikohe, to immerse himself in a practice that’s been known to him since he was a child (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author).¹¹

¹¹ Matavai Taulangau, in talanoa with author, Tāmaki Makaurau, July 6, 2019.



Figure 55. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo*, still image. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.

When his parents decided to resettle in Aotearoa, they too searched for a place of familiarity. This influenced their decision to make the small town of Kaikohe their home (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author). In some ways, Kaikohe is similar to the villages of Tonga. In conversation with me, Matavai described his hometown as being little, and because of its small population, the communities within it are very tight-knit (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author). He mentioned there is a small contingent of Tongans living in Kaikohe, everyone knows everyone (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author). Like Tonga, the main source of income in Kaikohe is through farming, and the fonua is plentiful and used for cultivation (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author). During the harvest, the community continues to practice polopolo, a Tongan custom in which the first fruits from each harvest are offered to the vulnerable—single parents and elders (Tongilava, 1994:51).

There are three sections to Matavai's moving image installation *Ma'u Pe Kai*. The first part, *Polopolo* (2019), opens onto a community patch in Okaihau, which his church community cultivates. We begin to hear Tongan banter going back and forth between the men and women. Suddenly, we hear an old gentleman shout out in a light-hearted tone, "*longo longo pe masi'i a kai mapu!*" A female voice retaliates from afar with "*longo longo pe a kai mapu!*" The expression is a Tongan proverb that alludes to a person who plays marbles silently, without any showboating, yet is the one who will win. Even after the old gentleman's quip, the noisy harvesters continue with their boisterous behaviour.



Figure 56. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo*, still image. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.

Matavai recalled how harvesting by hand is tedious and agonising work and from time-to-time people needed comic relief to break that tension:

It's funny when they all get together, the husbands and wives and elders all just mock one another. I noticed the way they got through the physical intensity by talking and telling jokes, and then later on, when it was getting dark, they would start singing. That was their way of enduring this process and the pain that came with it. (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author)

The highlight of this first part features three women each working on their own row of kumala, slowly making their way towards the camera. With each kumala they pull out of the ground, a celebration mixed with laughter follows right after. Tongans are well known for their high-spirited celebrations, especially when it comes to supporting the national sports teams, including *Ikale Tahi* (Tongan Rugby Union) and *Mate Ma'a Tonga* (Tongan Rugby League). One woman plucks a kumala out of the soil and holds it up to her face to make a size comparison. She calls out to the skies, “*SIO KI HE!*” (look at this!), gesturing to the large vegetable next to her face. The other two women concur with a call of their own and celebrate with her. The harvesting continues.



Figure 57. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo*, still image. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.

The second part of *Ma'u Pe Kai* is shot from a personal perspective. This time the protagonist is the artist's mother, harvesting her small kumala patch in her backyard in Kaikohe. Matavai's mother's method of harvesting kumala is not as celebratory as the other three women in the first part of the video, but watching her work in peace—pulling the kumala out of the loose dirt, brushing the dirt with her hands, revealing each kumala with every brush—is just as satisfying. It must be a humbling perspective for the artist, especially watching his mother working in the garden. As Tongan kids growing up in Aotearoa, we see this every day in our peripheral sights, but when in focus and presented on a screen in front of us, we can't help but feel we've missed an opportunity to learn something: a connection with our parents who understand how to have a connection with the fonua.

In the last part, the artist reveals himself. Unlike the first two sections of the video work, he is not harvesting kumala. Matavai is starting from the very beginning: the planting of the seed. He returns to Tāmaki Makaurau, this time with an understanding of how to connect with the fonua, having experienced the harvest with his community and his mother in Kaikohe (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author). Matavai talked about the pedagogy of his upbringing in Kaikohe; he values the way his parents taught him and his siblings through experience. “The practicality of things, learning from doing, I think is really important because most of the times that’s how we worked when I was younger, knowledge was gained from experience (Taulangau, 2019; talanoa with author).” Meyer shares the same sentiment as Matavai when it comes to gaining knowledge; she mentions a Hawaiian saying “*ma ka hana ka ike*” (at the sight of experience comes knowledge), which is deeply embedded in Matavai’s pedagogical upbringing, “knowledge that turns to knowing because we have really experienced it (The Kohala Center, 2009).” It is as if Matavai is deploying epistemological approaches that detail the cultural complexities of his Tongan family and, like Apelu, engaging with the general public through his artworks. Matavai’s exhibition *Ma’u Pe Kai* takes us from an *almost* Tongan community patch of kumala in Okaihau, to his mother harvesting her small kumala patch in her backyard in Kaikohe, and then to Tāmaki Makaurau where he plants his own seed of kumala to connect with a different but continuous fonua. Like me, Matavai negotiates his anga fakatonga culture experienced through his ongo mātu’a while adapting to life in Aotearoa and perhaps realising the privilege of being in limbo. The knowing aspect Meyer refers to is evident in this project, and works hand in hand with the term emic. Which leads to my next topic, researching talanoa from a collective of people belonging to certain social groupings such as working class, migrants and religious groups.

Lived experience through collectives

In my artwork, collectives can be extensively involved in the research gathering processes. A talanoa usually begins with an individual, and by the end of collecting these conversations, I would have talked to a group of people belonging to a particular culture or sub-culture. This process of interacting with a particular stratum, society or community, gives me an understanding of how they function collectively. The emic sense employs an observational approach. Utilising epistemological approaches focuses on the action, collecting through doing. Knowing through experience is a common pedagogic tool, especially with migrants, who are coming into hegemonic realms such as Aotearoa.

Not only do I gather new knowledge and research information through exchange of words, but through experiencing the actions involved in the story being told. With this, I have discovered other organised collectives that work in similar environments, working in response to issues involving working class and migrants in Aotearoa. I have often been invited to participate in other organised art collectives to gain the emic and epistemological viewpoint of how they work with these societies.

Below are examples of a few collectives that I have worked with, not only in the interest of a ground-breaking practice led research but for the promotion and development of my/our practice in the public domain—which naturally is a good place for a new and heterogenic art talanoa to occur. This Brings new knowledge and methods of research into the field of contemporary individual, collaborative and co-operative practices. Recently I/we have begun to distinguish between collaborative practice and co-operative practice as a distinction arising from the issues of authorship and exploitation in relation to an autoethnographic research and methods where people are involved together in the ethical development and production of artworks. I/we are emphasising a responsiveness to others such as listening and working sympathetically with others, not being totally sure what we need from others or what they might need from us. Thus, extending conventional art collaboration amongst fellow artists towards something more holistically community based, both in its production and reception. Here are examples of some collective co-operative practices I have worked with. Co-operative practices also create powerful and productive dilemmas of methodology in my/our practices. For example, I might want to control quality in collaborative artworks (which are a form of social critique through talanoa) but cannot do this without being a kind of overseer in the project: a position that I feel uncomfortable with except perhaps in co-operation with my immediate family who are willing to participate but defer all artistic authority to me. So, in a wider co-operative group context, I lose elements of control which can be challenging but productive.



Figure 58. H.E.P.T. (2013). *Cultivate*. [Live Performance]. Exhibition: Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker, Hawkes bay MTG. Napier, New Zealand.

H.E.P.T. (already introduced in Talanoa Usu 1) have been working together since 2008, their main focus is to enable others to succeed. They originally formed as a response to the individualistic studio culture prevalent in arts institutions. The name, ‘Help Each other Pass Together’, speaks to the whakapapa of the founders. The collective has grown over the years and their facilitatory practice has been kept intentionally broad to enable responsive and adaptive methods of working. For a lot of the projects, identities are obscured and attempts are made to neutralize the culture of the bodies and individuals at work through uniformity and anonymity. The culture of H.E.P.T. is inclusive, co-operative and beyond self. This method of working provides a prototype in opposition to the predominant cult of individualism prevalent in western artistic culture.



Figure 59. D.A.N.C.E. Art Club. (2012). *D.A.N.C.E FM 106.7*. [Community Engagement]. Erupt Festival. Taupō, New Zealand.

Auckland-based artists collective D.A.N.C.E. Art Club (Distinguished All Night Community Entertainers) organises events and exhibitions which celebrate the social dynamic as a creative platform. They encourage audience engagement and participation as a way of opening up conversation and making art accessible to diverse audiences. The D.A.N.C.E. Art Club and H.E.P.T. collective formed in 2008 when we were at art school together at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Auckland. We would often collaborate on art projects with performance and social interventions. D.A.N.C.E. Art Club created a project *D.A.N.C.E FM 106.7* (2012) which was a mobile radio station as part of the Taupō Erupt Festival in 2012, broadcasting and meeting with communities across the region during the festival (Amery, 2012). Fitted with media and broadcast devices, the mobile radio station D.A.N.C.E FM 106.7 operated from a panel truck (D.A.N.C.E. art club, 2012). This project operating “outside of traditional social structures (Amery, 2012)”, brings people together as a community through interviews and public discourses then broadcasted back to the community. This relates to whakapapa encouraging audience engagement and participations as a way of opening up conversation and making art accessible to diverse audiences.



Figure 60. (2013). *The Roots: Creative Entrepreneurs, Ko Au Te Awa project*. Glen Innes, Auckland, New Zealand.

The Roots Creative Entrepreneur aims to give young people opportunities to develop and showcase creativity, innovation, and design by educating them about environmental awareness and sustainability. They aim to inspire generations through creativity and sustainability by delivering projects, workshops and programmes focused on young people and giving back to community. As one of the mentors for the Roots Creative Entrepreneur for the *Ko Au Te Awa* project, I helped tutor a group of secondary students from the Glenn Innes area to create a bamboo light sculpture that was part of the Matariki light show held in the area. *Ko Au Te Awa* is a restoration project of the neglected Omaru river in Glen Innes that leads into the Tamaki River (Carnegie, 2016). During the school holidays in July, we conducted workshops with the students where they would design their own sculptures reflecting the Omaru River. This is an example of how Roots Creative Entrepreneur inspire generations and use workshops and programmes to focus on young people.¹²

The ideology that all these collectives have in common is the way they work within society/ies using differing methods that utilise epistemological thinking. For example, the H.E.P.T. collective with their unique anonymous approach to helping people by nominating skilled individuals from the group to help artists. The D.A.N.C.E. Art Club create social

¹² To access the video of the outcome, go to this link: https://youtu.be/G1dCcH_D-68

happenings in a themed context to give audience access to different ways of socialising. The Roots Creative Entrepreneur collective uses a co-operative approach with local artists who understand their communities and work with young local kids who are from their areas and give them an epistemological understanding of how to creatively respond and highlight an issue to raise awareness within their community.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter discusses the notion of limbo and ‘Pasifika edgewalker’ as a liminal perspective or place which can be considered as being displaced, but I prefer to see as a place of belonging between tamasi‘i muli (boy foreigner) in Tonga and islander here in Aotearoa. This ironically reveals the privilege of being in limbo. I look to my upbringing in Aotearoa and the ‘anga fakatonga’ culture experienced through my ongo mātu‘a (parents) who migrated here from Tonga, where I negotiate between the two and where I establish a place to belong to. I compared this to being in limbo. Anne-Marie Tupuola’s term Pasifika edgewalkers helps me locate myself within this sense of dislocation. I further discussed the notion of Pasifika edgewalker in relation to fonua, where I find myself and my family in a dislocated sense of limbo in relation to land and property ownership and therefore a sense of belonging. A key concern discussed is how youth participants express their differing views through their art practice and I referred back to the art performance *One Kiosk many Exchanges* and discussed where the participants chose the limbo/Pasifika edgewalker margins to establish their art practices. I also briefly discussed Pasifika edgewalkers in positions of responsibility as researchers, arts managers and curators that champion our own knowledge systems. I then recounted my experience of working at the Pepsico Bluebird chip factory in the summer breaks which influenced the art installation *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*, relating it to limbo lived experiences as an academic (during semester) and a factory worker (in the semester breaks). This extended into interpreting these lived experiences as metaphorical movements, accentuating these acts into a durational performance. I related these metaphorical movements to key Pasifika edgewalker artist Darcell Apelu in durational performances such as *Slap* (2012). As Niuean/NZ she negotiates the effects of a tatau within her family. Another key Pasifika edgewalker artist Matavai Taulangau was discussed and his video works that deal with what Manulani Aluli Meyer calls “knowing gained by experience” (The Kohala Center, 2009). Lastly, I discussed lived research experiences through talanoa with co-operative collectives as a key epistemological approach to this practice-led project. I reflected on other organised Pacific collectives that work in similar environments, working in response to issues involving working class and migrants in Aotearoa in relation to the Limbo/Pasifika edgewalker.

Talanoa Usu 2: Mo‘okū‘auhau as Tukufakaholo

This Talanoa Usu segment discusses two artworks that were included in the inaugural 2017 Honolulu Biennial. The artworks are titled *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* (2017) and *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* (2017), a work already been introduced in the Preface that stems from my family experience of land disinheritance. I have discussed this experience, contextualised as anga fakatonga and tamasi'i muli in Chapter 3 in relation to the overarching concept of the Pasifika edgewalker. The first part of this Talanoa Usu is a literature review of the book *The Past Before Us: Mo'okū'auhau as Methodology* edited by Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu which has a focus on Hawaiian concepts of methodologies and I will translate these into relevant Tongan terms. Mo'okū'auhau might be translated into Tongan as Tukufakaholo, meaning a temporality that spans past, present, future. My artwork *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* involves complex negotiation between Hawaiian, Aotearoan and Tongan contexts. My key research methods involving talanoa and fanongo talanoa, as listening and hearing, enabled this artwork to develop as mentioned in Chapter 1 on talanoa.

A year before the Biennial in Hawaii, I was given the opportunity to conduct research to propose new artwork. This led me to do a two-week research residency in Honolulu Hawaii. As artist/researcher using the Indigenous concept of talanoa in a foreign country, I understood the perspective would be through an etic approach. These controlled and uncontrolled talanoa I've had with locals in Hawaii have been reflected on while in the process of producing artwork for the 2017 Honolulu Biennial. Most of the uncontrolled exchanges were set in bus stops, buses, taxi and with the controlled exchanges set in artist talks, community centres, artist studios and organic farms.



Figure 61. (2016). *Upside down Hawaiian Flag*. University of Hawaii at Manoa. Honolulu, Hawaii.

This two-week residency was approached through the etic experience. I intended to operate within this research cautiously, aware of myself as the outsider looking inside Hawaiian culture and politics. Until this residency, I had only been gathering talanoa within an Aotearoa context from where I live. This means as the artist/researcher I am not exempt from any political criticism my artworks critique. Being the outsider was a foreign experience. Even though I looked like a local, the locals would point out quickly from my accent that I was an outsider. Even though the residency was only two weeks, my intention was to learn and experience Hawaiian culture and reflect on those experiences from an Hawaiian context *as well as* from the perspective of where I come from, reflecting the concept of ‘Aloha ‘Āina as a Tongan living in Aotearoa. As already briefly outlined in Chapter 1, I endeavoured to focus on and critique issues to do with Hawaiian labour which were not my own lived experience. In trying to make an artwork about the Dole Food Company (fruit and vegetable producer) in Hawaii and America’s exploitation of their local produce, I had some conflict with the assistant curator Ngahiraka Mason. I discuss this dilemma further later in this Talanoa Usu segment.



Figure 62. Vea, J. (2017). *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, still image.* [Video].

As outlined in the Preface, the installation for the Honolulu Biennial responds to the Native Hawaiian concept of Aloha Āina (love of the land) within the context of my Tongan homeland. In Tonga, women are unable to own land or fonua, contrasting to Hawaiian land values and rights. My mother is the eldest of three female siblings; therefore, as the eldest son, from the result of my grandfather's passing, I legally own my mother's land. This Tongan tradition has provoked legal battles between my immediate family and my distant relatives. The artwork is based on a game from my childhood called 'Eggs in a Basket' which involves stealing as many rocks as possible from opponents within the allocated time frame. I apply this concept of competing for ownership within the more sinister context of my mother's battle to retain her home.

The artwork therefore references social events and how they are coordinated in cooperative ways, or not. In these ways, my art practice engages with the experience of Pasifika edgewalkers as a state of limbo, understood as an experience of two or more cultures, or a not belonging to a place, or in between places. In this context, talanoa research methods privilege fewer rigid parameters, encouraging processes of storytelling in co-constructed layers.

From a Tongan perspective, this Talanoa Usu discusses tukufakaholo as it relates broadly in a Tongan world view of genealogy or whakapapa. I encountered problems translating the word genealogy to English from a Tongan dictionary which says ‘hokohoko ‘o e fāmili, which is a very surface translation meaning family succession. So, I asked my mother for her understanding of the term Mo‘okū‘auhau. In response to hearing the Hawaiian definition she relates it to the Tongan term Tukufakaholo. She emphasises a meaning that relates to pass on, where to pass does not just mean us or the future, it has temporal meaning that relates to the past, the present and the future. In this we become conduits for ways of being and knowledge repositories. This Talanoa Usu is mindful of this particular Tongan understanding of tukufakaholo.

Wilson-Hokowhitu defines Mo‘okū‘auhau as methodology that “is as much about our connections and relationships to places in the natural world, as it is about our past, present, and future people. This understanding is ancestral and intergenerational” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:xi). Wilson-Hokowhitu refers to her own lived experiences of how she realised the practice of Mo‘okū‘auhau while sailing with the canoe Hokūle‘a¹³ in the Pacific Ocean through the Rapa Nui (Easter Islands), Marquesas Islands and Tahiti, making connections and relationships with the moana, stars, sun and all natural elements involved with sailing (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:xi). These phenomenon and experiences have triggered a moment where she reflects on her past memories of home and her grandmothers’ homestead. This is what Mo‘okū‘auhau as methodology is: “extending from our long lineage of understanding and knowing” through our ancestors, us in the present and the future (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:xi-xii). There are multiple Indigenous contributors to this book, and each of the contributors writes a chapter on their own knowing of Mo‘okū‘auhau as methodology.

The following Talanoa Usu draws out key ideas of five of these contributors who all explore the notion of Mo‘okū‘auhau as methodology through their own exploration of Indigenous research within their area, and they are relevant to how talanoa is practiced in my practice led PhD. All these contributors to *The Past Before Us* will be contextualised throughout this Talanoa Usu in relationship to my participation in the inaugural 2017 Honolulu Biennial with the artworks *she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina* and *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn’t*.

¹³ Hokūle‘a is a Polynesian double-hull canoe that has had multiple expeditions in the Pacific Ocean.

These contributors have assisted me in discussing the following issues. The first section focuses on how Ku‘ualoha Ho‘omanawanui discusses Mo‘okū‘auhau in relation to how and why we present knowledge as a genealogical relationship to starting points and this relates to how we as Tongans or Pacific Peoples connect to our succession of generations: our ancestors’ wisdom. Connecting to the ‘Aloha ‘Āina’ in the 2017 Honolulu Biennial artworks was essential, as land that relates to Tongan tukufakaholo. The second section focuses on talanoa as talk story. In this respect, Kū Kahukalau proposes repositioning ourselves in Indigenous research through Ma‘awe Pono, a Hawaiian research methodology through ‘talk story’ which is an approach similar to talanoa that is also relationally mindful. The third section focuses on ‘Umi Perkins and discussion of bloodline issues to do with access and ownership of land by and for Indigenous peoples. As already indicated, this has a hugely personal aspect to me because of inheritance issues in my fāмили where currently females can still not inherit land in Tonga. The fourth section focuses on face-to-face encounters. Mahana Blaich Vaughn builds on a view put forward by Ho‘omanawanui emphasising that we need to speak and interview people face-to-face on the land, listening to their stories in order to engage with their whakapapa. And lastly, Hokūlani K. Aikau emphasises the inside/outside dilemma. Even though she is Indigenous to Hawaii, she is still considered a malihini (stranger, foreigner) to He‘e‘ia, a place in O‘ahu Island. This last point is important to my projects because, for me as a Tongan researcher, there can be issues in regards to access. While I understand Ho‘omanawanui’s approach and the importance of tracing mo‘okū‘auhau or tukufakaholo through the ‘āina —and Vaughn’s emphasis on talking to people on the land, I still encounter problems, even as a Tongan/Pacific researcher, in arriving or getting access to material and knowledge. This is why Aikau alludes to the serious question of who is native and a stranger to a place and what Kuleana comes with this status. The limbo perspective comes to mind when Aikau asks how we situate ourselves. All these cultural concerns fold into, or have relationship with, research methodologies. Referencing Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Ho‘omanawanui emphasises this cultural foundation as she writes: “Methodology [is]... not just the methods you use, but the reasoning behind them; [they are] the set of underlying principles that inform research” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:54; see Smith, 1999:109). And Ho‘omanawanui continues to say: “In other words, it is both the how and the why of presenting knowledge. Within an Indigenous framework, these questions are rooted in a cultural foundation” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:54).

These five notions discussed here, folding into my research methodologies, appear in other places in the exegesis, alongside slightly different stories and reflections. While this may seem like unnecessary repetition, it is designed as a way of reinforcing repeated storytelling or talanoa and reflects many of the ways my research and artworks come together. If it was not for this multi-layered and recurring cultural foundation, these artworks would not be rooted in Indigenous frameworks. This is a valid scholarly research method, and part of this method does involve myself consulting with my mother. Even though I speak Tongan I refer to my mother for a more nuanced understanding of Mo‘okū‘auhau in a Tongan context. Thus, as Umi Perkins discusses blood quantum, I am led through my mother to discover language

quantum; the smallest division of language meaning. Throughout this exegesis there is evidence of the practice of Mo‘okū‘auhau/Tukufakaholo, where I have been counselled by, for example, whānau, a Kaitiaki of The Garden of Memories in Howick and a Matua in Honolulu, Hawaii. Without the guidance of these people who have kuleana to a place or a culture, my response through my art practice would be a detached one.

Mo‘okū‘auhau as Tukufakaholo: past, present, future

I begin with an introduction to the notion of Mo‘okū‘auhau. Wilson-Hokowhitu & Meyer explain that the Hawaiian saying “I ka wā mamua” means the time in front, influencing the title *The Past Before Us: Mo‘okū‘auhau as Methodology*. It acknowledges all that come before ourselves (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:1). Tongan academic Hūfanga ‘Okusitino Mahina, interprets past, present, future as Moana (Pacific) people walk forward into the past and backward into the future (2010:170). Mo‘okū‘auhau is fundamental to Hawaiian epistemology and to our sense of knowing and being (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992:233; Wilson-Hokowhitu & Meyer 2019:2). The English translation of Mo‘okū‘auhau is a diluted explanation mistakenly oversimplified as ‘geneology’. Ku‘ualoha Ho‘omanawanui elaborates that Mo‘okū‘auhau “in its narrowest sense, [it] refers to biological lineage”, and is inclusive of “a genealogical relationship” which applies “to people and living things” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:54). Ho‘omanawanui states that it is “the genealogical starting point of all things Hawaiian” the piko (core) (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:54). In the following, Ho‘omanawanui breaks down the term Mo‘okū‘auhau through a Hawaiian *olelo* (language) understanding:

One meaning of the root word mo‘o is “series or succession”; kū has myriad meanings, including to stand, resemble, reveal, transform and rule the land, while one definition of ‘auhau’ references the leg bones. One way of understanding mo‘okū‘auhau is the succession of generation standing on the bones of the ancestors. (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:54; referencing Elbert and Pukui, Hawaiian dictionary, pp.31&167; original emphasis)

Ho‘omanawanui goes on to emphasise that Mo‘okū‘auhau is about “connecting to one’s ancestors and their wisdom” and to the ‘āina (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:54).

Tukufakaholo ways of being through lived experiences passed down through generations

These connections to ancestors through wisdom and ‘āina are also enhanced through oral traditions. Rev Paula Onoafe Latu’s Phd thesis (titled *Ko e Tala Tukufakaholo ‘o Tonga: An Alter Native Holistic Historiography of Tonga history from their own traditional oral culture and through their own people’s eyes*) defines Tala-Tukufakaholo with reference to H.M. Queen Salote where she explains it as the way “stories were orally passed down through the ages” (2017:16). Queen Salote further describes it as:

Ko e Tala na’e ‘ikai hano tohi, ka e kei Tukufakaholo mei he ngutu ki
he telinga, mei he matu’a ki he fanau.

Their chronicles/narratives were not documented on [paper] or [in]
books but were passed down from mouth[s] to ear[s], by fathers to
their children. (Latu 2017:30; author’s translation)

The importance of Tukufakaholo for my project relates to how its spoken form captures, in the words of Latu, a “fakamatala me’a hokohoko or a successive narrating of its embodiments in people’s life events, attitudes and generations” (2017:32). For *she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina* this was an important way of being as lived experience as the artwork evolves. For this artwork, tukufakaholo begins with my mother’s stories of my grandfather Sione Kafoa. As outlined in the Preface, I often stayed with my grandfather at Tilbury Place in Avondale as a child which gave me insight of him as a person indirectly receiving life lessons but I did not realise the lessons until he passed. I get an extension of my grandfather through my mother’s accounts of him as a fisherman in Tonga and migrating here to Aotearoa working in the factories. Tukufakaholo exists through my mother’s stories of her lived experiences of my grandfather and these successions of stories from my mother are passed on to me. This version of tukufakaholo is not only received through generational oral narratives but also through generational fonua chronicles.



Figure 63. (2017). *Filming, she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, on my mother's property.* Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.

Talanoa as talk story: Mā'awe Pono – Kū Kahakalau

Mā'awe Pono is a Hawaiian research methodology that emerged through three decades of in-depth study which involved many native Hawaiian co-researchers organised by the Kū-A-Kanaka Indigenous Research Institute. Native Hawaiian educator Kū Kahakalau breaks down the meaning of mā'awe pono. In the Hawaiian language mā'awe “refers to a narrow path or a trail” and pono is “everything that is good and right from a Hawaiian perspective”. According to Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui, “mā'awe pono” refers to the (right) track of honour and responsibility (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:9; Kahakalau referencing Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972:19).

There are parallel ethical intentions in regards to the approach to research with the Hawaiian concept of Mā'awe Pono and my approach through the lived research experience of talanoa. Pukui's interpretation of Mā'awe Pono can relate to the importance of our Indigenous perspective as a Tongan or a Hawaiian, re-positioning ourselves as researchers/writers following “the (right) track of honour and responsibility” that empowers Indigenous understanding. In some ways Pukui's metaphoric explanation of mā'awe pono can extend into being relationally mindful for those who come before us and those who come after us as cited by Tecun on talanoa in the first chapter.

Kahakalau discusses how Mā‘awe Pono relies on a more informal conversational method, what Hawaiian’s call ‘talk story’ which involves sitting together discussing a topic in a safe, familial environment. It is a place of aloha or love and compassion that allows the participants to share their knowledge, experience and expertise openly in a nonthreatening way (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:16).

Kahakalau’s explanation of talk story, and how I practice talanoa, are both practiced in an ethical way, being relationally mindful of the individual or community. Talk story and talanoa consider all aspects of relationships when in exchange with an individual or a collective: the connection to the site, the relation to the community, and sometimes the relation to an object and movements. As mentioned by Kahakalau, talk story is sitting together in a safe and familial environment. In talanoa, the place is just as important as the person or community I talanoa with, and the relationship with the environment is key especially if I am foreign to the area. As elaborated in Chapter 1, talanoa is an Indigenous concept of relationally mindful critical oratory (Tecun 2018:156) and talk story can be discussed in similar ways. This relates to aspects of my studio practice where I negotiate all things involved in my art projects. To be relationally mindful, I look at how I research, who and how are the participants involved, are the participants’ perspective being given voice, how can I relate without patronising or taking away from their perspectives, how can we share this project equally, what community is involved, what place is involved, how is the artwork going to impact both the community, will it be a confrontational piece and/or will it empower, or both. All these aspects are considered when making an artwork where talanoa/talk story is where we negotiate our relation to experiences, cultures, communities and connections to place through dialogue.

Talanoa relational compassion

As said in the Preface, I went to Hawaii in 2016 for a two-week residency to conduct talanoa: commissioned to make a new work in response to these exchanges in Hawaii for the inaugural 2017 Honolulu Biennial now currently moved to a triennial format. During my two-week residency, every time I would talanoa with Hawaiians or people living in Hawaii they would refer to the exchange as ‘talk story’.

These exchanges through talanoa/talk story could sometimes lead me into doing illegal activities like smoking cannabis or pretending to eat magic mushrooms which may seem an uneasy setting in which to conduct talanoa but it was something I was willing to do to make it a comfortable exchange for the participant and myself. Ethical here doesn’t necessarily mean following the moral law in society. It sometimes means other ways of being ethically responsible where relational compassion takes over. I recall another time in Napier here in Aotearoa on a residency for a solo exhibition at Hawkes Bay MTG when I befriended a guy on my way to my hotel. We had a random talanoa on issues around living in Napier and Hastings. He invited me to a drink up with his mates at a bar called the Red Carpet and, of course, I said “yeah”. On entering the bar, I noticed it was full of guys wearing red, with some of them wearing the Mongrel Mob patched leather vests. I was a bit intimidated at first, until they shouted me beers. They asked if I played footy (Rugby Union) and if I could play for their team the coming Saturday. I don’t think I spent any money that night at the bar. This was an occasion where talanoa extended to taking part in the activity of the participants. It led me to having an exchange with a random person on the street, going to a bar full of Mongrel Mob members and sharing a few beers with them. I declined their invitation to play for their footy team as I was leaving that Saturday morning. To back track a little in this story, the guy I met on the way to my hotel gave me some insight to the conceptual framework of how the exhibition would function at Hawkes Bay MTG. He shared his orchard picking experiences on working with the ‘Recognised Seasonal Workers’ (RSW), but it was his admission that he would never pay money to see an exhibition at Hawkes Bay MTG that was most significant. I had the same experience when I took my civilian friends to a gallery hop around Tāmaki Makaurau. They too would have not made the effort to enter these places on their own accord because of how exclusive they find the art gallery culture and the expense. I expand on this topic further in Chapter 4 How is Talanoa political? where I discuss the politics of site and spectatorship.

In my experience with talanoa, it is often a spontaneous exchange, setting and activity that prompts research developments, whether sitting on a bus, walking to a place, or in a fai kava circle. In the event of smoking weed with a stranger, or drinking beer with Mongrel Mob members which may seem an uncomfortable situation, I consider it a similar setting to having a coffee at a café or drinking kava at a fai kava. Returning to Kahakalau's 'talk story', these contexts can be described as sitting together in a safe place of aloha and compassion that allows the participants to share their knowledge, experience and expertise openly in a nonthreatening way. This aloha and compassion can be extended to what the participants consider aloha and compassion. The talanoa/talk story with the gentleman from Napier started on the sidewalk and it could have concluded there, but there was trust built between us the further we exchanged and the reciprocity felt comfortable enough to invite me to a bar where his mates were having a drink. That said, even though these exchanges are done with respect and aloha, there is always a cautious approach for my own safety as well as the participants when the exchange moves to a different setting.

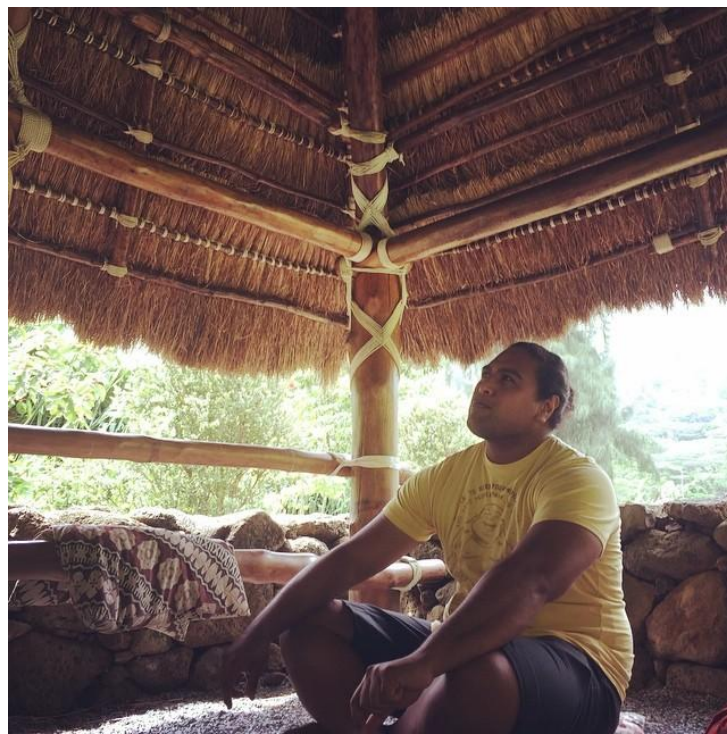


Figure 64. (2016). *In a hale with Imaikalani Kalahale*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

On my second day in Hawaii, a friend Noelle Kahanu picked me up from the Lincoln Hall at the University of Hawaii in Manoa where I was staying. Noelle organised a meeting with Imaikalani Kalahale, an activist artist who lived in Kalihi Valley. Before this meeting with Imaikalani, I arrived in Hawaii without any planned appointments, as always, my goal there was to let talanoa lead this research residency with a fluid and organic approach, which is a clear research method applied in my art projects here in Aotearoa. I had only just met Noelle Kahanu the day before at a potluck dinner with co-founders of the Honolulu Biennial and

friends. I shared with her my approach to my art practice and talanoa and Noelle immediately compared talanoa with talk story. This is how my connection with Imaikalani Kalahale came about.



Figure 65. (2016). *You can hear the highway over the mountains.* Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Noelle and I met with Imaikalani at his place in Kalihi Valley in a high dense bush area that looks secluded from everything but you can still hear the ambience of the motorway just over the hill. The three of us had talk story on many things. I shared what my intentions for the Honolulu Biennial exhibition and Imaikalani shared his lived experiences in Honolulu. Noelle shared her proposal on creating an alternative Biennial for the many Hawaiian artists that were left out for the 2017 Honolulu Biennial. He mentioned he was an army veteran and fought in the Vietnam war. His outlook on life had changed on his return to Hawaii from the impacts of being in the military. Imaikalani discussed how the landscape of Honolulu was changing physically and politically, because of the American influences in Hawaii. This was a time where Hillary Clinton was leading in votes over Bernie Sanders to be the Democratic representative in the Presidential election against the Republican representative Donald Trump, and everyone in Hawaii was on edge at the time. There was a particular phrase Imaikalani alluded to that I kept repeating to myself after the talk story. In his Hawaiian pidgin accent, he said: “What we do with all da concrete rubbish?”, referring to the concrete jungle and the excessive concrete the property developers produce every time they build and rebuild.



Figure 66. (2016). *Bushwalk to Imaikalani Kalahahele's studio*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Even though the phrase, when read out is not something anyone else might have noticed, it was the way he said it, as if it was said so many times, his tone and facial expression etched deeper in his body every time he mentioned it. This is what I mean when you talanoa/talk story with someone, the exchange is fanongo talanoa; hearing, seeing and sometimes feeling the lived experiences that furthers a deeper understanding of the relationships of people across time.

Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't (2017)



Figure 67. (2017). *Filming Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* with Jimmy Wulf, Robert George and Matavai Taulangau. Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.

A common approach in my art practice is that a title develops from a talanoa, like the art work “you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me” (2018). Other methods of naming my artworks are comments made by colleagues and fāmilī of mine. For this instance, after seeing the video work for the first time, my former PhD supervisor, Andy Thomson, came up with the title *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* (2017), named after the introduction text in Brian Massumi's book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. This video installation critiques Western society's preoccupation with putting up artificial barriers between the natural world and people. As said earlier, I was also struck by Kalahēle's statement, “what we do with all da concrete rubbish?”, which was in reference to the Island becoming a concrete jungle and the excessive concrete that developers produce every time they build and rebuild. Thus, the title is generated through different but related talanoa. In *Concrete is and Concrete Doesn't*, two figures (myself and Matavai Taulangau) lay a small number of interlocking concrete pavement blocks to create a path for us to walk on across the landscape of Maungarei (Mt Wellington). We painstakingly reuse the concrete pavers, taking them from behind us and placing them in front of us, like a constantly moving concrete raft across the landscape. The performance to video demonstrates the repetitive actions undertaken by labourers and the low wages they receive for their efforts.



Figure 68. (2017). *Maungarei Stonefields Archaeological sign*. Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.

Maungarei is the maunga (mountain) I grew up around. We moved here from Herne Bay in 1989. As a result of gentrification, our landlord sold the rental property we were living in and we moved out to East Auckland Mount Wellington (McClure, 2016). I went to Panmure District School as a kid and every morning we would hear sirens go off at around 8am, this would become our time keeper, when we would start walking to school. The sirens came from the ‘Mount Wellington Quarry’ that sits to the west of the maunga and there was a rumour around school suggesting the sirens were a warning for the Mount Wellington community, that there will be explosives going off at the quarry. The quarry stopped operating in 2008 after all the raw materials of Maungarei had been exhausted. It “is now the site of the Stonefields subdivision” (Auckland Council, n.d.). Stonefields is a suburb featured in the video work *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn’t* and has similar significance as the re-development that Imaikalalehe comments on in Hawaii. The Stonefields name derives from the ancient archaeological site where early Māori settlers used it for cultivation (Archaeopedia, 2017). If you stand on top of the maunga facing the re-development, on the left is the ancient site which features in the video work *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn’t*. This relates to tukufakaholo as it is a succession of lived experiences with our relationship to Maungarei and the activities around from ancient times to the current. In this regard, I go back to the talanoa I had with Imaikalani, looking into my own back yard around the issues of redevelopment and effects on the environment.



Figure 69. (2016). *Archaeological site, Maungarei Stonefields facing Mangarei (Mount Wellington)*. Auckland, New Zealand.

I caught up with Imaikalani a second time, just the two of us. I came with a box of Heinekens as a gift. I heard his favourite beer are ones that are in green bottles and I assumed it was the famous Dutch brand. He picked me up from the University of Hawaii, we went driving around Honolulu, we talk story on the road. On our way to China Town Imaikalani breaks at the lights, he points out my window and says “that’s the state bird of Hawaii!”. I turn and look to find the bird, at first a bit confused as there was no bird to be seen but a lot of crane machines erected in the downtown area. I finally clicked; he meant the cranes. We continue on our drive around Honolulu heading to Kalihi Valley and went on a walk through the bush. We stopped at a tree, he points to the trunk of the tree and says this is Cory’s work, the trunk of the tree had a mural on it, done with highlighted orange spray paint. The tree he sprayed painted was an invasive tree and was endangering the survival of the native trees in Hawaii and Cory was marking them out with his murals. Maybe it was a way to slowly destroy the invasive trees. I meet Cory Kamehanaokalā Taum later in my trip on another occasion. Imaikalani and I continue on walking through the bushes until we reached his studio with the box of beers in tow, sitting and continuing our talk story/talanoa. I assumed he was rolling tobacco and he offers it to me asking if I smoke marijuana. It’s been a while but I take the first hit.



Figure 70. (2016). *Imaikalani Kalahale's studio*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

I go back to my grandfather Sione Kafoa, helping him roll his tobacco as a kid and his advice not to smoke tobacco. This time travel takes me to the notion of Mo'okū'auhau as the past before us and its relationship with the Tongan notion of tukufakaholo. Like a state of limbo, this talanoa was a medium, communicating with both the dead and the living, as already said, "likened to narrative interviews" (Fa'avae *et al*, 2016:138) but extended across time. As it turned out, Imaikalani was the connection between me and Cory involved in a group exhibition in 2019 called 'like drawing a line in the sand at the ocean's edge' in Hessel Museum of Art, New York, curated by Drew Kahu'āina Broderick who was one of the artists involved in the 2017 Honolulu Biennial. If it was not for these talk story/talanoa serendipitous moments of exchange these connections with people and artworks would not exist in their current form and, in this respect, these are significant methods in my research.



Figure 71. Broderick, D. (2019). *Cory Kamehanaokalā Taum, Beneath Concrete*, 2019. [Floor Installation]; *John Vea, Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't*, 2017. [Video Projection]. Group Exhibition: like drawing a line in the sand at the ocean's edge, Hessel Museum of Art, New York, USA. <https://ccs.bard.edu/museum/exhibitions/482-like-drawing-a-line-in-the-sand-at-the-ocean-s-edge>

Indigenous restrictions to accessing land ownership

When I caught a bus from the University of Hawaii, I asked a local sitting next to me for directions to get to Chinatown in Honolulu Hawaii. He showed me directions on a map on his phone. We continued having a talanoa on general stuff happening in Hawaii. He pointed to a hilly suburb: “you know over there; you need 50% Hawaiian blood to live there.” My bus stop was coming up, and I didn’t get what he meant, so I just nodded my head as if I understood and got off the bus. Later I googled Hawaiian blood percentage, and the first website that shows up was ‘Applying for Hawaiian Home Lands - Department of Hawaiian Home’. Here, I reference ‘Umi Perkins explanation of the Hawaiian Homes Commission act:

As a result of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA), a Native Hawaiian means “any descendant of not less than one-half part of the blood of the races in inhabiting the Hawaiian islands previous to 1778.” In order to claim Hawaiianess, and homestead leases and benefits in the name of Hawaiians, individuals must formally substantiate their 50 percent blood quantum..... Many Hawaiians to this day, however, cannot formally prove their Hawaiianesss (2002, xiv). (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:72-73)

I became more interested in Indigenous restrictions to accessing land ownership and this was fundamental in the development of my artwork *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina*. This discussion also relates to the notion of limbo already discussed in Chapter 3, applied here to a sense of belonging.

Land Act: Section 41 – Rules of succession:

In the 2016 revised edition of the Land Act, under section 41 - Rules of succession, it states:

Upon the death of a holder of an hereditary estate the succession to the estate shall be as follows:

d) the male issue shall be preferred to female issue of the same degree;

Examples

- On the death of a holder leaving a son and a daughter, the son is entitled to succeed.
- On the death of a holder leaving a grand-daughter and grand-son, children of the same parents, the grand-son will succeed. (Attorney General's Office, Tonga, 2016:26)

As mentioned in the Preface, when my maternal grandfather passed away, I inherited my grandfather's land in Tonga: because my mother is the firstborn child out of my grandfather's three daughters and I am the eldest son of my mother's children. As it says in the Tongan Land Act, woman "cannot hold a hereditary estate and title." If a female "is next in succession, she is allowed to occupy the estate but the estate and title is passed through her, to the next male in succession" (Australian Red Cross, 2018:9).

The artwork *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina*, tries to interpret and shed light on the patriarchal exclusiveness of Tongan land entitlement and its unethical treatment towards female rights to own land. It does this through successional storytelling initiated in Honolulu Hawaii on the bus to Chinatown: a talanoa with a passenger who informs me that to live on the Hawaiian homesteads you must have 50% Hawaiian blood.

This, in turn, looks to my situation with land access in my mother's treatment of land ownership in her home country in Tonga and in contrast to land she owns in Aotearoa. I refer back to the Kū Kahukalau's Hawaiian research methodology through 'talk story' called ma'awe pono, similar to talanoa that is also relationally mindful. Being relationally mindful to the Hawaiian situation with land restrictions, and connecting it to my mother's land issue in Tonga, activates a Mo'oku'auhau or a Tukufakaholo approach to the artwork *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* where I look to my own lineage to interpret what I learned from the passenger on the bus heading to Chinatown.

Face-to-face, lived experiences

As mentioned in Chapter 1 on talanoa, as a kid, I only accessed elements of talk story/talanoa because I was sitting under the table. This overhearing becomes a recollection of my childhood, it becomes a framework for an artwork. Face-to-face does not have to mean facing each other, but an intimate context for listening. In this sense, my work is like weaves through a mat; weaving through interwoven genealogies. In this context, Mehana Blaich Vaughn discusses weaving together stories that function like a lei.

Vaughan emphasises the importance of research via “natural resources” of lived experiences through others who have first-hand knowledge of a place, because through generations they “know the land through living from and with it” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:30). Accordingly, I refer back to the artwork and discuss the significant face-to-face encounters with other practitioners. As mentioned, Imaikalani became an important catalyst in the development of the performance to video artwork *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* because of his lived experiences on the 'Āina of Hawaii. However, even though Imaikalani helped initiate the idea, there are other practitioners who gave me an additional wider picture to how living in Hawaii has treated them, that may have contributed to the making of this work.



Figure 72. (2017). *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't*, still image. [Video]

These are people like Cheryse Kauikeolani Sana and Kamuela Enos from Ma‘o Organic farms who shared their lived experiences through revitalising Hawaiian Indigenous methods of agriculture and education. The artwork was also influenced by Hawaiian academic Manulani Meyer and her writing on Hawaiian Epistemology (referenced in chapter 3), who shared and elaborated on native Hawaiian thought, cosmology and culture of Aloha ‘Āina. My talanoa network of contributors also included actor Misa Tupou who migrated to Hawaii from Aotearoa sharing his lived experiences through his networks of creatives that made Hawaii their home. And Su‘a Sulu‘ape Toetu‘u Aisea a Tufuga Tātatau (master of traditional tattooing), shared his lived experience reviving the lost traditions of Tongan Ta Vaka (Tongan Tattooing). All these different face-to-face lived experiences from practitioners who live on Hawaii gave me “a larger perspective on the place and community it represents” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:30).



Figure 73. (2016). *Lopeti Toetu‘u, John Vea and Su‘a Sulu‘ape Toetu‘u Aisea at Soul Signature Tattoo. Honolulu, Hawaii.*

The Inside/Outside dilemma

This section is a continuation of the discussion in Chapter 3 and the term ‘limbo’. In Chapter 3 I concentrated on gender relationships pertaining to a sense of limbo, while this section comments on kuleana as a way of belonging when researchers and artists find themselves both inside and outside on cultural frameworks. Hokulani K. Aikau exemplifies this as she recounts:

I should have known better but I didn’t. I let myself get caught up in the thrill of the invitation being asked to work with Kāko‘o Ōiwi, a Native Hawaiian nonprofit working to restore lo‘i kalo (wetland taro farming) in the ahupua‘a of He‘e‘ia on O‘ahu Island, that I accepted without fully understanding the who, what, where, and why of it all. I said “yes” and never looked back. I agreed to join the research team because of the opportunity it afforded for doing community participatory research. I was eager to join a project committed to making the ‘āina (land, that which feeds) momona (abundant) once again. Early on in the project it was very clear that my positionality as a diasporic Hawaiian would be a problem for some members of the larger community. Although I knew I would need to build trust, I failed to fully grasp the degree to which I would be considered malahini (a stranger, foreigner). (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:81-82)

Following this first-person account Aikau structures her chapter around what she calls three ethnographic moolelo vignettes, thinking through the term’s native, non-native, settler, and malihini in the context of land-based Indigenous research. She offers the concept of hoa‘āina (friend of the land) as a way of being attentive to relationships and ‘āina without necessarily having mo‘okū‘auhau (family connection to the land). Hoa‘āina is arrived at by “working with and for the land” (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:82; quoting Aikau). She searched out ways of shifting her thinking away from being kama‘āina or kupu‘āina (a child of the land), to other ways of forming relationships that still carry kuleana (responsibility) (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:87; paraphrasing Aikau).

Aikau describes her first meeting with the ‘Auntie’s’ (the group of visionaries and drivers of the project). She had prepared an introduction that she thought would show the aunties that she had something useful to offer. At the opening meeting they went around the room introducing themselves and each of them presented their mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) as it related to the project. Aikau explained her mo‘okū‘auhau and her role as a social scientist and team and shared her personal reasons for wanting to be part of the project: she was eager to be part of the process that would allow her to reconnect with ‘āina while also working to help the ‘āina become momona again. Aikau realised she was naïve and should have been more

prepared for the suspicious reaction from the aunties even though she worked hard to be dependable and trustworthy. It was not until later that she came to see the situation from their point of view. Aikau alludes to a Hawaiian poetical saying: “No neihei a‘e nei no;he aha ka ‘ike?”— This person just arrived, what do they know?”. Aikau was a stranger to this place, both He‘e‘ia (the place of the project) and in many ways of Hawaii, and she had much to learn (Wilson-Hokowhitu et al, 2019:83).

From this perspective, for the project *she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina* I found myself in a similar situation as a malihini. I had to look at my own relationship with the ‘āina and consider how I would work with and for the land, taking kuleana. This was problematic because I was not in Hawaii for a lengthy stay and therefore unable to give people my time and work on the land beside them. In place of this more lengthy and embodied relationship with the ‘āina, I listened to locals talking about the land and their relationships with it, translating those talanoa back to my Tongan situation living in Aotearoa. In these processes, there are always elements of compromise. It is not as if I find myself arriving at an ideal situation.

In a similar way to Aikau perhaps, I proposed a project to the assistant curator Ngahiraka Mason. I was preparing to make an artwork about the Dole Food Company in Hawaii. I wanted to make a political statement about the way in which fruit was grown in Hawaii and then marketed overseas, but sold back to the locals at overseas prices. Ngahiraka gave me a good telling off and reminded me that I was not from here (Hawaii) and that I should be telling my own stories. The following day I was walking through Chinatown in Honolulu and had a brief encounter with a bouncer at the door of a nightclub. During that talanoa he told me off about intruding in local politics saying “you look like us but you don’t belong here”. The exchange was a casual and humorous face-off but nevertheless reiterated Ngahiraka’s comments the day before.

On my return to Aotearoa, after being scolded by Ngahiraka, I reflected on the talanoa I had in Hawaii from the perspective of where I come from. With this I referred back to my exchanges with Imaikalani Kalahela and experiences in Ma‘o organic Farms.



Figure 74. Vea, J. (2017). *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't*. [Video Installation]. 2017 Honolulu Biennial, Honolulu, Hawaii. Image credit: Honolulu Biennial.

Conclusion

This Talanoa Usu has explored connections with the Hawaiian concept of 'Aloha 'Āina' in the 2017 Honolulu Biennial artworks *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* (2017) and *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* (2017). Because this project involved a two-week residency in Hawaii and talanoa that helped create the artworks, I have been interested in exploring how I was able to engage in Hawaiian issues to do with the love of the land and how those issues relate to Tongan tukufakaholo. In doing so I discussed *The Past Before Us: Mo'okū'auhau as Methodology* edited by Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu, and the Hawaiian researchers who contributed to the book. Firstly, Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawanui discussed Mo'okū'auhau in relation to how and why we present knowledge as a genealogical relationship to starting points and this relates to how we as Tongans or Pacific Peoples connect to our succession of generations: our ancestors' wisdom. In a relational effort, I explored the Tongan understanding of Mo'okū'auhau, described by my mother as Tukufakaholo, which relates to pass on generationally. This was further supported by Rev Paula Onoafe Latu's Phd thesis *Ko e Tala Tukufakaholo 'o Tonga*. In the second section I discussed Kū Kahukalau's Indigenous research through Ma'awe Pono, a Hawaiian research methodology through 'talk story' which is an approach similar to talanoa that is also relationally mindful. The third section explored 'Umi Perkins discussion on bloodline issues to do with access and ownership of land by and for Indigenous peoples. I related these land issues to my own personal situation with inheritance issues in my fāмили where females

cannot inherit land in Tonga. In the fourth section, I looked to Mahana Blaich Vaughn's face-to-face encounters building on a view put forward by Ho'omanawanui emphasising that we need to speak and interview people face-to-face on the land, listening to their stories in order to engage with their whakapapa. And lastly, I discussed the inside/outside dilemma described by Hokūlani K. Aikau. Even though she is Indigenous to Hawaii, she is still considered a malihini (stranger, foreigner) to He'e'ia, a place in O'ahu Island. All these cultural concerns fold into, or have relationship with, research methodologies in my thesis project. The following chapter looks into the notion of limbo and 'Pasifika Edgewalker' as a liminal perspective.

Chapter 4 - How is Talanoa Political?

As already discussed, my performance practice engages with Pacific minority groups—exploring tropes of migration and subsequent interaction with hegemony—where ‘co-operations’ with collectives and small groups challenge some traditional research models of leadership and authorship. This chapter argues that these Indigenous approaches encourage a different reading of theorists such as Chantal Mouffe and her ideas of navigating artistic activism and agonistic spaces of shared cooperation (see Vea, Braddock 2018).

As previously noted, Timote Vaoleti explores talanoa as a Pacific notion that guides appropriate collective research processes in order to “preserve the integrity of all participants in the research” (Vaoleti, 2006:32). There are possible points of convergence between the ideas of Vaoleti and Mouffe. For example, Mouffe insists on debunking the concept of the artist as a unique and privileged avant-garde individual whose creative genius delivers a decisive critique on society. Her emphasis on collective art activist groups (which also corresponds with my artistic approach) has something in common with Vaoleti’s emphasis on the collective processes of Pacific peoples as communities in Aotearoa. These collective processes typical of talanoa research methodology undermine reliability and consistency in research results (Vaoleti, 2006:32) and this has quite a lot in common with Mouffe’s seemingly paradoxical ideas about an antagonistic democracy in which struggles and differences must remain visible and where forms of rational reconciliation are impossible and deliberately jettisoned (Mouffe, 2007:3).

There are also differences between the ideas of Vaoleti and Mouffe that are difficult to reconcile. For example, talanoa seems to harbour ambitions for collective harmony that Mouffe might resist in favour of her concept of public space as a battleground where different hegemony projects confront each other without a need for reconciliation (Mouffe, 2007:3). But it might be possible that the Pacific ways of going about research offer other ways of interpreting Mouffe’s ideas of adversarial democratic politics (Mouffe, 2007:3,5).

Some of these Pacific ways include things like *faka'apa'apa* which involves respectful, humble and considerate behaviour, while *anga lelei* concerns researchers understanding the participant's context and situation in ways that are tolerant, generous, kind, helpful, calm and dignified (Vaiotele, 2006:30). There are many other protocols to be considered, but one that stands out is *'ofa fe'unga* which combines compassion and generosity “to the point of there being nothing left to give away” (Vaiotele, 2006:31), while such generosity is tempered relative to a given situation. This ethical approach is also fundamentally about maintaining integrity and “not affecting the world of the participants in a negative or superficial way” (Vaiotele, 2006:31).



Figure 75. Veia, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

This chapter will discuss my artwork I produced for the Sydney gallery 4A titled *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* (2019), one of the last artworks produced during this PhD candidature. I will also discuss Luke Willis Thompson's *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* (2012), a work situated outside the gallery in an alternative place at the Hopkinson Cundy gallery, Auckland 2012.

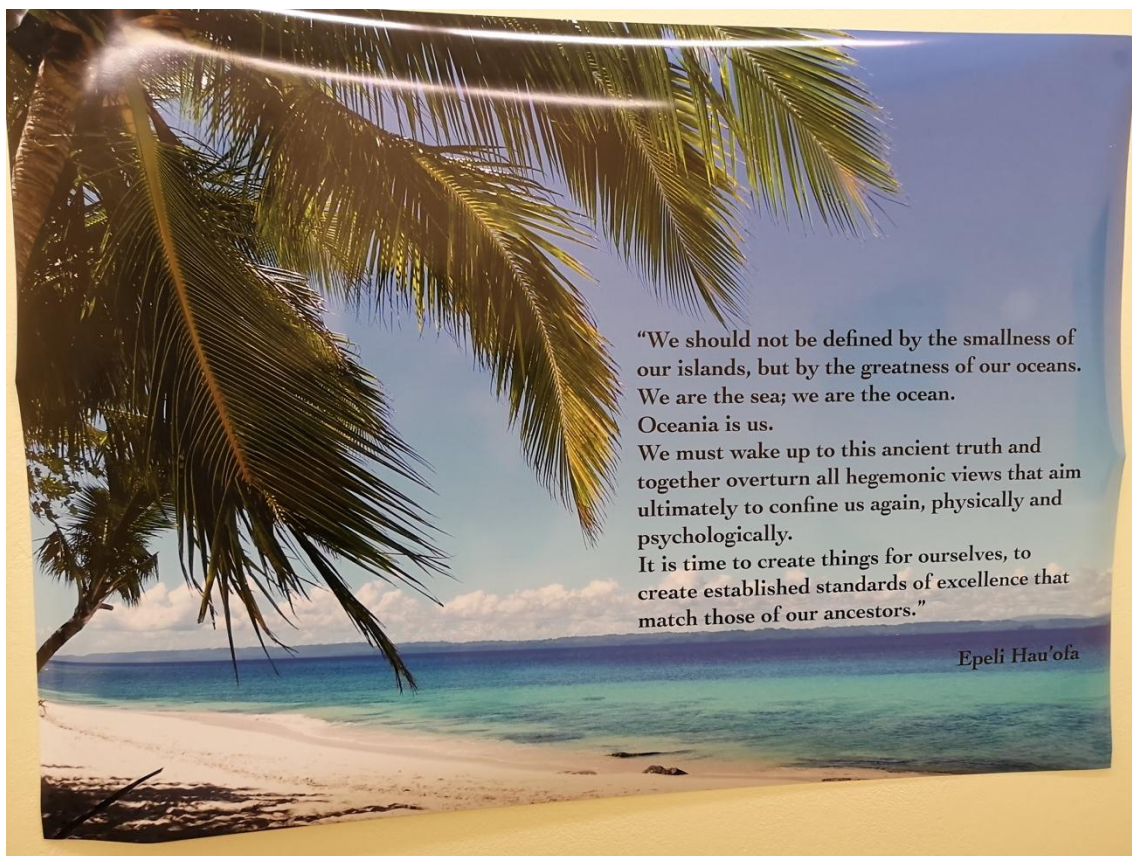


Figure 76. Veia, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?*. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back? (2019)

As part of the overall exhibition *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* I constructed a lunch room installation titled *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000* (2019). The artwork was a response to construction workers sitting outside the gallery and shopping malls having lunch. They stood out because of their overalls, and they appeared there regularly during my visits to Sydney to organise the exhibition. The laws around eating lunch and work breaks, also in the Aotearoa context, influenced the title of this installation taken from the Employment Relations Act of New Zealand (see Stanhope, 2020).

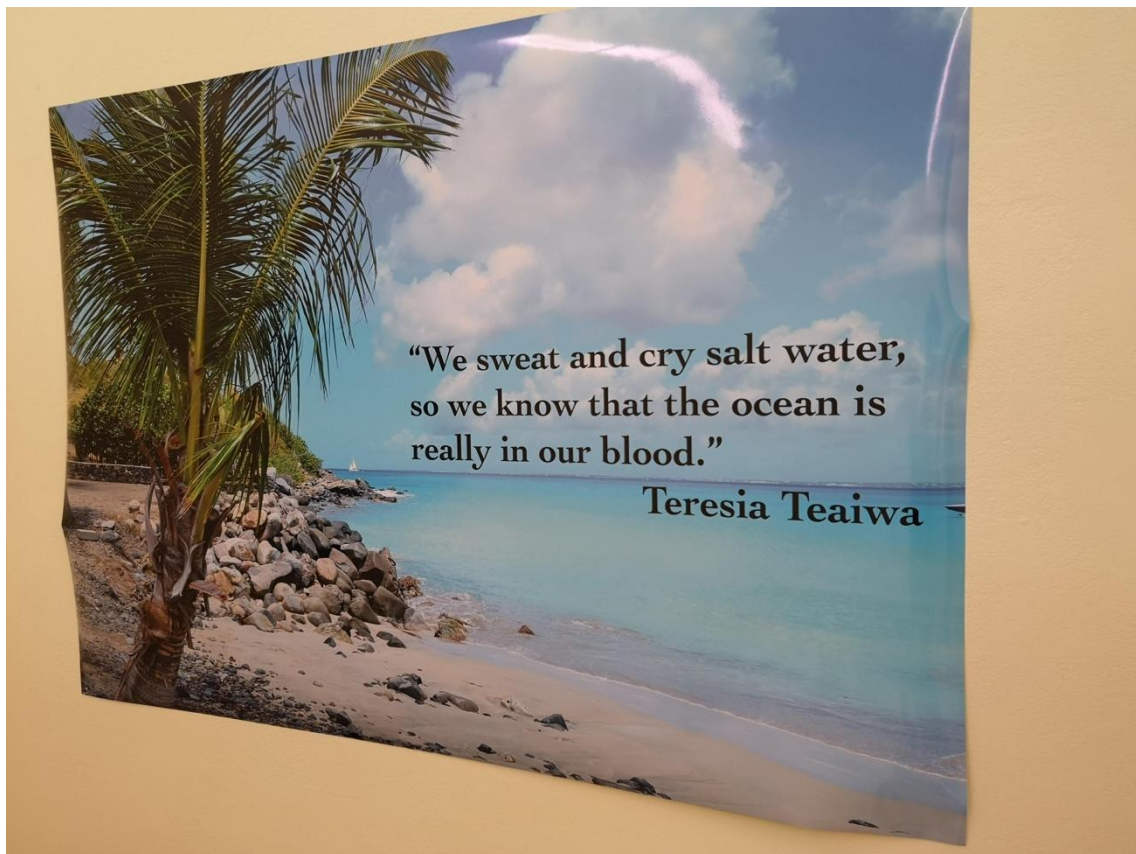


Figure 77. Vea, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?*. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Inside the lunchroom were tourism posters I designed and printed of the Pacific idealising the Pacific Islands. These were similar to posters in the Pepsico Bluebird lunchroom discussed in Chapter 3 Limbo/Pasifika Edgewalkers for the artwork *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me* (2018). There were quotes on the posters from notable Pacific academics ‘championing’ our Pacific way of life. For example, Teresia Teaiwa saying: “We sweat and cry salt water as we know that the ocean is really in our blood”. Articles were also pinned up on the noticeboard from publications such as the Guardian and Sydney Herald, plus others from Aotearoa such as the New Zealand Herald. These were problematic articles that refer in derogatory ways to Pacific peoples. One such article from the Guardian by Ben Smee quoted the deputy prime minister of Australia Michael MacCormack saying that: “Pacific Island nations affected by the climate crisis will continue to survive ‘because many of their workers come here to pick our fruit’, Australia’s deputy prime minister has said.” Smee continues:

Michael McCormack’s comments were made after critical talks at the Pacific Islands Forum that almost collapsed over Australia’s positions on coal and climate change. The acting opposition leader, Richard Marles, said on Friday evening: “These are ignorant comments from the acting prime minister and he should know better”

McCormack’s comments are not the first time a senior member of the government has been recorded making controversial remarks about the impact of climate change in the Pacific. In 2015, the then immigration minister, Peter Dutton, was caught by a live microphone joking with Morrison and the then prime minister, Tony Abbott, about rising sea levels. (Smee, 2019)

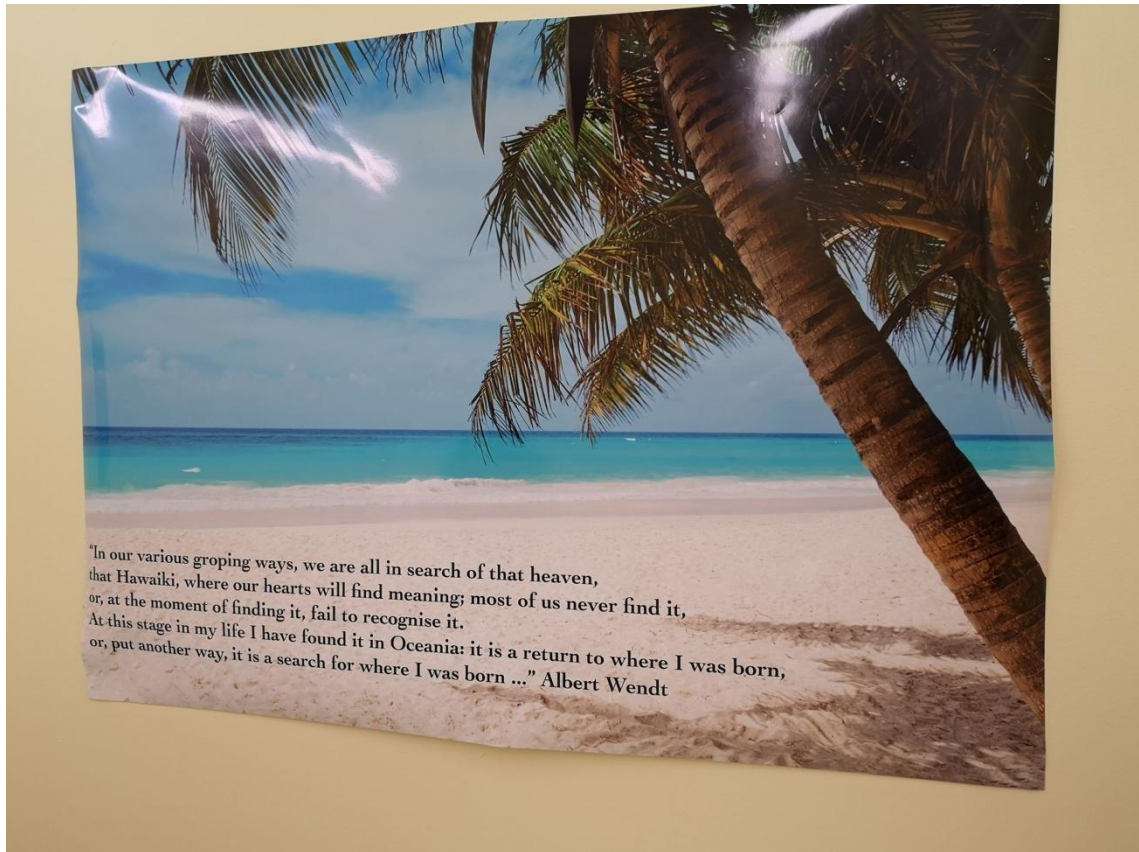


Figure 78. Vea, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

The lunchroom had plastic tables and chairs and walls painted a dull yellow. On the coffee table next to the hot water jug there were cans of corn beef, Tai-yo Mackerel and the fmf brand breakfast crackers commonly found in Pacific household kitchen pantries. We also installed a phone on the wall with a written list of phone codes to all the Pacific Islands written in vivid on ripped pieces of paper.



Figure 79. Ve, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.



Figure 80. Ve, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

The development of this artwork came about through talanoa with key individuals who understood the social political landscape of Sydney, Australia. This involved: Mikala Tai, Director of 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney; Dr Michael Mohammed Ahmad, the founding Director of Sweatshop Literacy Movement; Tongan writer Winnie Dunn who is Manager and Editor for Sweatshop; Talia Smith Pacific artist from Aotearoa; Latai Tamoepeau Tongan artist working with durational performance, addressing issues of race, class, climate change through her body. During my visit to Sydney, we discussed about Pacific communities living in Sydney and how the community as well as other minority groups are treated poorly by the Australian government.

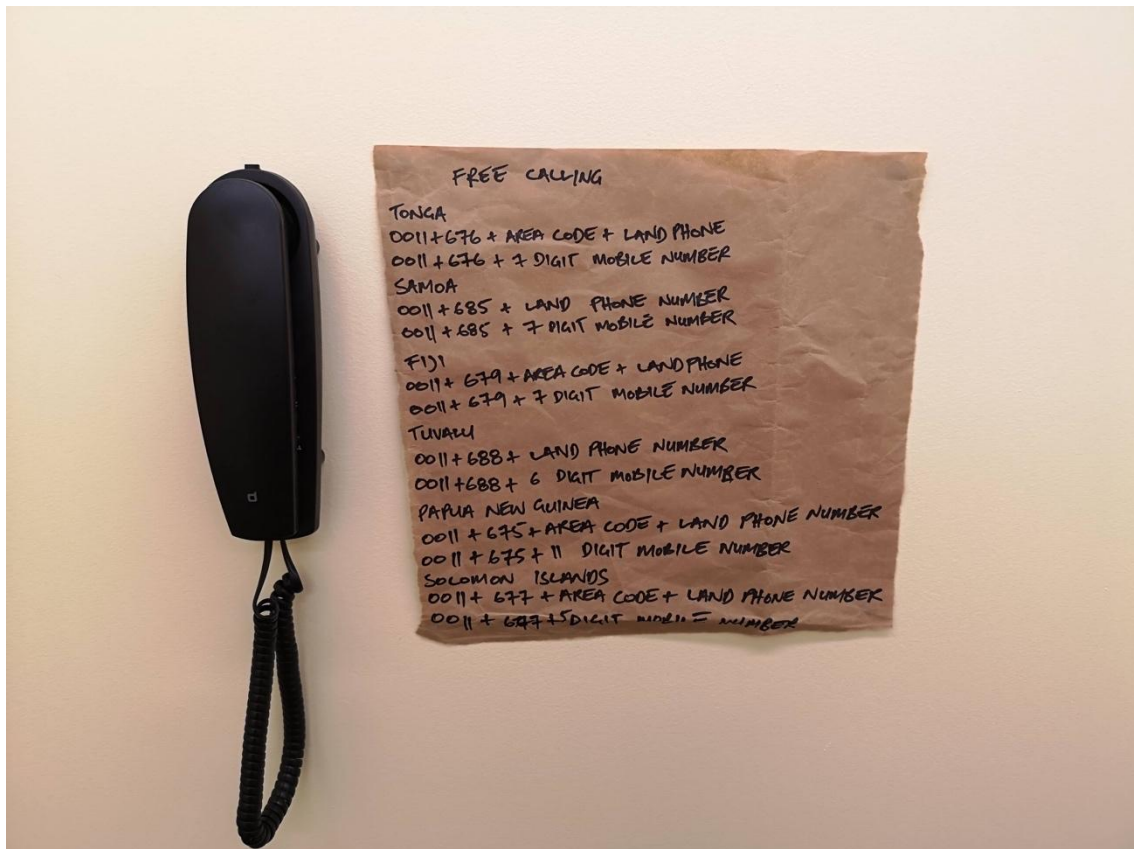


Figure 81. Vea, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

The lunch room, *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*, was open during work breaks: 15 minutes at 10 am, 30 minutes at 12 midday and 15 minutes at 3 pm. There was a plastic white chain barrier across the entrance at other times and viewers had to look in on the room from behind the barrier if they visited in times other than working breaks. The installation involved compromise in discussions with the gallery. I had originally wanted the space to be used by actual labourers and workers from the vicinity of the gallery which is located in Chinatown and Haymarket, Sydney. In the end, divisions between what could be called everyday working spaces and the contemporary art space meant that it was difficult to proceed with these perhaps more radical ideas. These compromises are at the heart of this chapter as I discuss the possibilities of contemporary art having political effect on communities.



Figure 82. (2019). *Workers having lunch break in the mall. Sydney, Australia.*

Talanoa as harmonious or critical?

There are no clear answers here. Is it possible that Mouffe's desired 'adversarial democratic politics' is at odds with Indigenous forms of talanoa that often seek states of noa as equilibrium and balance as discussed in Chapter 1? However, it is also true that forms of talanoa across the Pacific diaspora engage with political discussion about necessities for change. How do Mouffe's ideas assist me in thinking through the approach of my art practice as a political agent of change?



Figure 83. Vea, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

While Hūfanga 'Okusitino Mahina argues that talanoa is "talking critically yet harmoniously" (Tecun 2018:157), a question remains about the nature of this harmonious exchange. There are differences between the ideas of talanoa and Mouffe's agonistic approach that might be difficult to reconcile. For example, talanoa seems to harbour ambitions for collective harmony that Mouffe might resist in favour of her concept of public space as a battleground where different hegemony projects confront each other without a need for reconciliation. But it might be possible that the Pacific ways of going about research offer other ways of interpreting Mouffe's ideas of adversarial democratic politics (see Vea, Braddock, 2018).



Figure 84. Vea, J. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?*. [Installation]. Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia.

Another off-site artwork installation, as an extension of this exhibition with the same title, was part of the 2019 Liveworks Festival at Performance Space in Carriageworks, Sydney, directed by Jeff Kahn. This Carriageworks market installation critiqued the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. The installation included four life size core flute cut outs of Pacific workers standing next to crates of apples. Viewers could put their heads through the holes where the faces had been, like at an Easter show fairground. I used to work as an installer for Exhibition Space, where they set up kiosks for the Tourism Expo out in Greenlane, Auckland designed to lure people to travel to the Pacific Islands, employing slightly similar strategies. Viewers engaged with these cut out Pacific workers and had their photographs taken, sometimes later becoming embarrassed at what they had unknowingly participated in. Also boxes of oranges had stickers on them that referenced hourly rates and the length of Visa working permits, these were in English, Samoan and Tongan languages. As Helen Murdoch writes for Stuff (and one of the articles pinned to the noticeboard in the lunchroom installation at 4A):

Pacific Island workers are fast becoming the glue keeping the region's pipfruit harvest together. And some growers want to see the number of Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers in the region increased next year as they feel the pinch of staff shortages.

Pipfruit New Zealand chairwoman Nadine Tunley said the RSE workers were critical to growers this year. The hot summer working days meant a number of orchards had noticed a high turnover of local staff, she said. (Murdoch, 2013)



Figure 85. Vea, J. (2019). *Oranges with stickers referencing visa and wage conditions of seasonal workers programs in New Zealand and Australia.*



Figure 86. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?: Participation with the installation.*

As Mouffe states, critical artistic practices that create agonistic public conversations are going to “unveil all that is repressed by the dominant consensus” and will therefore avoid all forms of consensus (2007:4). If anything, this art installation revealed the difficulties in arriving at agreements about how RSE workers are treated. As mentioned in Chapter 1 on talanoa, there were tensions in proposing this Carriageworks market installation with the existing market stall holders who tried to push the installation back behind the Carriageworks building where there were fewer market goers. It was clear from the beginning that consensus was not going to be achieved on all kinds of levels.



Figure 87. (2019). *Spectators taking photos, with the If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back? installation.*

Chantel Mouffe's Antagonism

Chantel Mouffe's essay 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces' argues for the importance of critical artistic practices in public spaces that never seek consensus. She seeks out art that acknowledges radical antagonistic political differences that are unsustainable and unresolvable.

What does Mouffe mean when she describes the political as antagonism? She means that "political questions always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives" (2007:2). This suggests that societies and the political are sites of plurality and conflict where rational solutions are not always evident (Mouffe, 2007:4). Thus, antagonism is an unavoidable and necessary dimension of the political. Mouffe argues that neo-liberalism is by nature rationalist and individualist in its approach and "unable to grasp

adequately the pluralistic nature of the social world” (2007:2). One of the main reasons, according to Mouffe, for neo-liberalism’s inability to grasp and relate to complex differences in society is its “rationalist belief in the availability of a universal consensus based on reason” (2007:2). By contrast, she writes that “antagonism reveals the very limit of any rational consensus” (Mouffe, 2007:2). From this perspective, Mouffe argues that democracy is paradoxical, involving an “agonistic struggle.... between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally” (2007:3). This implies that for democracy to succeed it must recognise societies as precarious and unstable; societies that advocate what she calls adversarial democratic politics. And this also means continually remembering previous historic hegemonic practices i.e., history and current social practices are never neutral.



Figure 88. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* installation opposite the Carriageworks Markets. Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia.

What might be radical about Mouffe's agonistic struggle is her resistance to ideas of agreement and consensus. What is important for this discussion about the critically political role of artistic practices is that, firstly, "public space is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation" (Mouffe, 2007:3) and, secondly, politics and art can never be separated: "There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art" (Mouffe, 2007:4).

Critical artistic practices that create "agonistic public spaces" are going to "unveil all that is repressed by the dominant consensus" and will therefore avoid all forms of consensus (Mouffe, 2007:4). Mouffe's definition of agonistic art is therefore "art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate" (2007:4). She gives examples of what she calls "artistico-activist practices" such as "'Reclaim the streets' in Britain or the 'Tute Bianche' in Italy to the 'Stop advertizing' campaigns in France and the 'Nike Ground-Rethinking Space' in Austria" (Mouffe, 2007:5).

The majority of stories that I gather in my art practice comment on post-colonial issues that affect the people I talanoa with such as factory workers, cleaners, seasonal workers, taxi drivers, religious leaders, refugees and so on. Most of the participants in my projects are migrants to Aotearoa or offspring of immigrants. The stories reveal that the Pasifika edgewalker constantly negotiates cultural hegemony. Like Mouffe, these talanoa recognise societies as precarious and unstable; societies that advocate what she calls adversarial democratic politics.

Luke Willis Thompson: *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* (2012)

For Luke Willis Thompson's *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* (2012), viewers are driven by taxi from the artist's central city dealer gallery, Hopkinson Cundy, to a Victorian style home in Epsom and are left to roam around the exterior and interior of the house. I experienced this work on my own and the Fijian Indian taxi driver felt comfortable to talanoa with me. He talked very highly of the current Prime Minister of Fiji and his ideologies on how Fiji should be governed. In a way, the driver was my usher to my etic (outsider) experience; he set the tone for the home encounter. Walking into the property, I started to have recollections of my childhood upbringing when I used to live in the 'ghetto' of Herne Bay back in the 1980s before it was gentrified.



Figure 89. Thompson L, W. (2012). *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*. Hopkinson Mossman. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://hopkinsonmossman.com/exhibitions/luke-willis-thompson-3/>

Willis Thompson uses the gallery as bait luring the unwary spectators on an unknown journey to an alternative place. Thompson's strategy in dealing with the gallery is to remove the spectator, transferring them to another place. With the current issues around escalating house values and the gentrification of areas around Auckland, Willis Thompson's work was confrontational for me in relation to my family's housing realities.



Figure 90. Thompson L, W. (2012). *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*. Hopkinson Mossman. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://hopkinsonmossman.com/exhibitions/luke-willis-thompson-3/>

Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam reminded me of when I take civilian friends into the art world, gallery hopping. They have often mocked these places and labelled them ‘death row for the artworks’. This made me question my approach in relation to the art institution. The art gallery is often seen as a neutral zone, but in my experience it has its own power dynamics. In this respect, Mouffe understands the art gallery to be one of constant battle between competing interests derived from a hegemonic system “without any possibility of a final reconciliation.”

For me, *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* gives an insight into power dynamics as an ongoing conversation. This is significant for how I understand talanoa to operate in art practices to do with lived experience and communities. Importantly, Mouffe contests some modernist notions of the artist as privileged and unique, making a kind of avant-garde critique. In saying this, agonistic artists cannot be seen as intervening in any political state of affairs but rather, artists, like everyone else, are inseparable and included in the very problems they ‘critique’. It is when these modernist illusions are abandoned that art might productively become part of an adversarial democratic politics (Mouffe, 2007:4; see Veia, Braddock, 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter began searching out common ground and differences between the ideas of Vaioleti and Mouffe. *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* explores the role of the artist researcher seeking out co-operations with various participants and often debunking the idea of the privileged researcher as connoisseur of decisive critique on society. As with Mouffe's definition of agonistic art, my performance practice is enmeshed and contingent with the fabric of stories and the problems they critique. The artwork confronts how Pacific Island peoples and specifically Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers are treated, perhaps bringing art into Mouffe's desired adversarial democratic politics (Mouffe, 2007:3). The artwork also aligns with Vaioleti's ideas about talanoa research methodology with their open-ended stories and highly contingent ways of beginning and ending (a story in a market) that undermine reliability and consistency in traditional academic research results.

My talanoa research and art practices reveal something about the state of limbo that treads cautiously between 'ofa fe'unga (compassion and generosity) "to the point of there being nothing left to give away" (Vaioleti, 2006:31) and an adversarial politics where public interactions are a battleground of different social powers. These battlefields address a myriad of hegemonic histories and stories involving Pacific and pākehā. The kind of talanoa advocated in these co-operative social artworks might find moments of profound reconciliation with individuals and collectives, like my taxi trip talanoa in *In this hole on this island where I am*. This is an antagonism that tries to combine 'ofa fe'unga with a political dimension that affronts unfair racism in its inability to grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world (Mouffe, 2007:2).

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

I introduced this exegesis with a Preface, designed as a starting point; a talanoa before the rest of the journey, place to introduce the main personal and driving motivation for the artworks contextualised in this overall practice-led PhD thesis. Reflected upon here is storytelling about aspects of my personal history; my ongo mātu‘a and my grandparents, our history of work, life and home-life as it has played out in Aotearoa. I discussed my artwork *she sows this ‘āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same ‘āina* (2017) where I referenced my grandfather’s music and his fonua. Through the anecdotes of my own and my family’s lived experiences, from an inside or emic perspective, I set the tone and direction of my art practice and its approach to issues of labour. The project becomes a discussion about the complexities of life and labour in the Pacific diaspora. How Pacific peoples adapt to relocation and issues of labour and laws around working, and how these play a part in our traditions, our living and family dynamics. As outlined in the Abstract, the project explored several related research questions. How do forms of talanoa operate across different tukufakaholo and timeframes, which included lived experiences and knowledge passed down through generations. Furthermore, I explored what it means to be anga fakatonga whilst living in Aotearoa. This led to discussing contrasting notions of talanoa in relation to contemporary Pacific diaspora experiences and urban living where I explored the term Pacific Edgewalkers borrowed from Anne-Marie Tupuola. Moreover, this led to questions about how talanoa engages with forms of political criticism? Throughout, my focus has been on practical problems encountered with Pacific talanoa.

Chapter 1 Talanoa, introduced my own interpretation of talanoa as a young fella through fanongo talanoa (listening or hearing); listening to talanoa being conducted by my ongo mātu‘a (parents) and family members and learning about them through manatu melie (sweet memories). As a literature review, I explored numerous texts on talanoa written by Pacific, Māori and Mayan academics that have a common goal: they all argue why Pacific led research and systems for Pacific people are important to allow a more ‘mo‘oni’ (real, authentic) study compared to many Western approaches. I referred to these academic texts in support of how talanoa is used in my practice-led PhD. This was followed by a discussion on how talanoa is applied in my art practice. Through a Tongan and Aotearoan perspective, I develop a performance art practice that includes collaboration and co-operation through Pacific collectives that extends into community relationships. What followed next was a short summary of what I call talanoa encounters that stem from ‘lived research experience’, rather than research methods, in the context of ‘academic’ research. These talanoa encounters included Pō Talanoa (talking about everyday things like politics, church, children and television) and talanoa usu which tends to be deeper and more intimate talanoa which is mālie and māfana (see Fa‘avae 2016:143). I used the term talanoa usu as intervals between chapters to keep the reading of this exegesis mālie and māfana. The discussion on Pō Talanoa referenced Mere Kēpa and Linitā Manu‘atu’s text on Pō Ako (night school), where they describe Pō Talanoa as a “curious dialogue in the night” (2006:16). I extended this idea to

talanoa after hours, not being bound to the institutional time where we feel free to let go. In what followed, I described doing talanoa through art practice that highlights difficulties in gathering stories (Fa'avae 2016:139). This was an attempt to outline some of the practical dilemmas experienced by researchers when using talanoa (Fa'avae et al, 2016:138). I gave voice to various talanoa dilemmas that have occurred during this PhD project. I discussed the privilege of being an insider/outsider artist researcher and how an inside perspective as a Tongan person offers a more accurate understanding than a person with an outside perspective who does not come from that culture. I discussed the importance of Indigenous perspectives in relation to my ongoing artistic practice which reflects on our own phenomena, our circumstances and situation, and the way in which this relates to collective memory and lived experiences (Tecun 2018:162). And lastly, I discussed talanoa as transparent storytelling and how the role of a facilitator might be fluid in a collective project.

Talanoa Usu intervals focused on the art projects or events that have taken place during this practice-led PhD. The segments are slotted in between the chapters to give an insight into how talanoa is embodied through a practical framework in each art project. Talanoa Usu discussed *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* (2016) where fanongo talanoa and Pō talanoa was further contextualised through this artwork. I discussed Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies to assist in the explanation of the research strategies I have used in making *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*. I used diary accounts of the research methods and processes enabling the artwork *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*, revealing inside autoethnographic perspectives on my engagements with individuals and collectives that make up the project. Explored within these diary accounts are conflicts around being an outsider as a Tongan artist researcher indirectly related to tensions between Tangata Whenua and Pākehā and the effects of colonisation. Kaitiaki Taini Drummond of the Emilia Maude Nixon: Garden of Memories was an important advisor to *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* in this context. I discussed gaining trust as an artist researcher and the kinds of questions that might be asked in a cross-cultural context (Smith, 2012:175-176) in order to research through talanoa methods in an art framework. I discussed my role as a PhD Graduate Assistant, recognising the art practices of Pacific undergraduate students in the Visual Arts Department of the School of Art & Design at AUT University who became participants in the *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* project. Here, 'giving voice' to Pacific artists in Aotearoa offered a different perspective where we were able to tell our own stories collectively. *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges* offers a significant and unique perspective in enabling an inside/outside view of social issues we come across as migrants, or children of immigrants. Participants were able to reflect on their art practices from these liminal/limbo perspectives. In this context, I discussed the participants' talanoa with Kaitiaki Drummond and her sharing of knowledge and experiences of the Garden of Memories.

Chapter 2 discussed the emic/etic insider/outsider dynamic that involves exploring the researcher's perspective and position. I discussed auto-ethnography and how it prioritises an insider approach where researchers analyse their own 'positions' with respect to other cultural fields of knowledge. I began to compare ideas about auto-ethnography, an emic point of view and Pacific notions of talanoa in relation to my art practice. Lastly, this led into a literature review of significant Pacific artists deploying auto-ethnography, emic perspectives and Pacific talanoa. Here, I discussed in detail Edith Amituanai's art project *Keeping on Kimi Ora* (2018), Janet Lilo's art installation *Right of Way* (2013) and Kalisolaite 'Uhila's lived experience performance artwork *Mo'ui Tukuhausia* (2012 & 2015).

Discussed in Chapter 3 is the notion of limbo and 'Pasifika Edgewalker' as a liminal perspective which, in the social sciences, is sometimes considered as being displaced, but I prefer to see these viewpoints as places of belonging: as a complex way of being between tamasi'i muli (boy foreigner) in Tonga and islander here in Aotearoa, thus realising the privilege of being in limbo. Anne-Marie Tupuola's notion of Pasifika edgewalkers offered some useful discussion in relation to transient cultures and fusions of cultures which express new ethnic identities for Pasifika. I related limbo/Pasifika edgewalkers to the art practices and participants in *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges*. I discussed Pasifika edgewalkers living in Aotearoa and the importance of positioning ourselves as researchers, arts managers and curators that champion our own knowledge systems from our lived research experience. I continued discussion on my lived experience as a factory worker which influenced the artwork *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me* (2018). Following this, I discussed metaphorical movements used in durational performances derived from lived experiences where I referred to the art performances of Darcell Apelu. I also discussed Manulani Aluli Meyer's seminar "Ike 'Āina: Sustainability in the Context of Hawaiian Epistemology" (The Kohala Center, 2009) in relation to artist Matavai Taulangau and his video works in his solo exhibition: *Ma'u Pe Kai* (2019) also influenced by his lived research experience. And lastly, I discussed lived research experiences through talanoa with co-operative collectives as a key epistemological approach to this practice-led project.

Talanoa Usu 2 discussed two artworks that were included in the inaugural 2017 Honolulu Biennial *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* (2017) and *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* (2017). As a means of discussing these artworks, I continued with a literature review of *The Past Before Us: Mo'okū'auhau as Methodology* edited by Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu which has a focus on Hawaiian concepts of research methodologies from Hawaiian academics. Firstly, I discussed my research residency in Hawaii in reference to the Hawaiian concept of Mo'okū'auhau, defined by Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawanui. I translated Mo'okū'auhau into the Tongan concept of tukufakaholo which can mean lived experiences and knowledge passed down through generations. Secondly, I discussed Kū Kahukalau's explanation of Hawaiian research methodology Mā'awe Pono that relies on talk story in relation to how I practice talanoa. Here, I discussed *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't* where talk story/talanoa with poet/activist

Imaikalani Kalahale led to serendipitous moments of exchange with connections to other people and artworks which are significant methods in my research. Thirdly, I related 'Umi Perkins discussion on Indigenous restrictions to accessing land ownership in Hawaii, to my artwork *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina* that comments on my mother's situation with land ownership in Tonga. Fourthly, I discussed Mahana Blaich Vaughn's text on the significance of face-to-face encounters with other practitioners that have first-hand knowledge and lived research experiences of places as a form of tukufakaholo. And lastly, I discussed Hokūlani K. Aikau's writing on inside/outside dilemmas in research. Even though she is Indigenous to Hawaii, she is still considered a malihini (stranger, foreigner) to He'e'ia, a place in O'ahu Island.

In chapter 4 I explored the common ground and differences between the ideas of Timote Vaoleti on talanoa research methodology and Chantel Mouffe's ideas on adversarial democratic politics. I related these discussions to the exhibition *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* (2019) where I discuss the installation artwork *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000* (2019) as part of that exhibition. I referred to Mouffe's discussion on critical artistic practices that create agonistic public conversations and how my art installation revealed some difficulties in arriving at agreements about how Recognised Seasonal Employment Scheme (RSE) workers are treated. Mouffe's essay 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces' argues for the importance of critical artistic practices in public spaces that never seek consensus. Lastly, I discussed Luke Willis Thompson's artwork *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* (2012) in relation to Mouffe's comment on agonistic artists who cannot be seen as intervening in any political state of affairs but rather, artists, like everyone else, are inseparable and included in the very problems they 'critique'. This seems to create some common ground between talanoa research methods of 'ofa fe'unga (compassion and generosity) and Mouffe's adversarial politics. Overall, the kinds of talanoa I advocate in co-operative social artworks might provoke moments of awareness and reconciliation, partly because the processes of talanoa are inseparable from the lives of participants involved as lived research.

In summary, my Grandfather Sione (ume) Kafoa helped begin my journey. His music and his love of fonua created manatu melie (sweet memories) that have affected my life's research. Pacific talanoa, especially fanongo talanoa, Pō talanoa and talanoa usu are valid 'academic' research methods employed in a socially engaged installation and performance art practice that includes individual and co-operative performances. Pacific artists deploying auto-ethnography and emic perspectives actively engage with these forms of talanoa research methods. The limbo and 'Pasifika edgewalker' are positive liminal perspectives that allow Pacific researchers and artists to negotiate feelings of not belonging anywhere within the Pacific diaspora. Other Pacific research methodologies such as the Hawaiian concept of Mo'okū'auhau are helpful in thinking through our local situations and can be compared to, for example, the Tongan concept of tukufakaholo which can mean lived experiences and knowledge passed down through generations. A question of talanoa as a form of political

change, or political activism, might raise some tensions between traditional Pacific ideas about talanoa and contemporary manifestations such as contemporary co-operative performance art practices. For my generation of urban Pacific edgewalkers, this is a process that needs to combine 'ofa fe'unga with critical social and political commentary. An advantage of the forms of talanoa research methods explored in this thesis project is that processes of talanoa are always inseparable from the lives of participants involved, meaning that 'noa', balance and equilibrium, can be sought alongside more critical forms of engagement.

List of Images

Figure 1. Vea, J. (2017). *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina*. [Video Installation]. 2017 Honolulu Biennial, Honolulu, Hawaii.
Image credit: Honolulu Biennial.

Figure 2. (2017). *Filming of the artwork she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, Fonua family*. Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 3. Vea, J. (2017). *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, still image*. [Video].

Figure 4. (2016). *Ma 'o Organic Farms visit*. Waianae, Hawaii.

Figure 5. (2016) *Ma 'o Organic Farms visit*. Waianae, Hawaii.

Figure 6. (2016) *Ma 'o Organic Farms visit: Pile of rocks collected from the field*. Waianae, Hawaii.

Figure 7. (2016). *Kaitiaki Taini Drummond with Valasi Leota-Seiuli, Jimmy Wulf and Newman Tumata*. Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 8. (2016). *Imaikalani Kalahale*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Figure 9. Vea, J. (2015). *Caution Cleaner*. [Video Projection]. Exhibition: Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker, Hawkes Bay MTG Forecourt, Napier, New Zealand.

Figure 10. Vea, J. (2015). *Caution Cleaner*. [Video Projection]. Exhibition: Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker, Hawkes Bay MTG Forecourt, Napier, New Zealand.

Figure 11. (2016) *Friday night, after hours talanoa with undergraduate students as a Graduate Assistant mentor*. AUT, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 12. (2017). *Sean Connelly and John Vea Artist Talks chaired by Ngahiraka Mason*. The Hub, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Figure 13. (2018). *Conversation On Art and Labour with Salome Tanuvasa and John Vea chaired by Ioana Gordon Smith*. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

- Figure 14. Vea, J. (2018). *If you build it, they will come. 1 of 8 property development drawings proposing for an international food court for the vacant i-site building.* Group Exhibition: (UN)CONDITIONAL IV. Ashburton Art Gallery, Ashburton, New Zealand.
- Figure 15. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back? installation opposite the Carriageworks Markets.* Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia.
- Figure 16. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo, still image.* [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.
- Figure 17. (2013). *The Roots: Creative Entrepreneurs, Ko Au Te Awa project.* Glen Innes, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 18. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back? installation opposite the Carriageworks Markets.* Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia.
- Figure 19. (2016). *Playing for the Howick Hornets Rugby League Club.* Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 20. (2016) *Research drawings for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project.* AUT PhD Studios, AUT City campus, New Zealand.
- Figure 21. (2016). *Research drawings for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project.* AUT PhD Studios, AUT City campus, New Zealand.
- Figure 22. (2016). *Kaitiaki Taini Drummond and for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project.* Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 23. Wulf, J. (2016). *Talanoa with my German ancestors.* [Performance]. Year 3 BVA group critique, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 24. (2016). *Kaitiaki Taini Drummond, Valasi Leota-Seiuli, Newman Tumata and Jimmy Wulf in Owairoa Marae.* Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 25. (2016). *Research drawings for One Kiosk, Many Exchanges project.* AUT PhD Studios, AUT City campus, New Zealand.

Figure 26. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, the H.E.P.T. collective*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 27. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, the H.E.P.T. collective*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 28. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Valasi Leota-Seiuli*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 29. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Newman Tumata*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 30. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Newman Tumata*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 31. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Jimmy Wulf*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 32. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Sione Mafi*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 33. Veā, J. (2016). *One Kiosk, Many Exchanges, Sione Mafi*. [Live Performance]. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand. Image credit: Amy Weng, Te Tuhi.

Figure 34. (2016). *Post-performance photo with Kaitiaki Taini Drummond*. Emilia Maude Nixon Garden of Memories, Howick, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 35. Amituanai, E. (2017). *Edith Amituanai, 'A feed at Flaxmere park'*. [Photograph]. Pantograph Punch. <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/review-keeponkimiora>

Figure 36. Amituanai, E. (2017). *Kavana Ioane, 'Sione swimming staunch'*. [Photograph]. Pantograph Punch. <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/review-keeponkimiora>

Figure 37. Amituanai, E. (2017). *Ati Tuliau (Year 6), 'New World'*. [Photograph]. Pantograph Punch. <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/review-keeponkimiora>

Figure 38. Lilo, J. (2013). *Right of Way*. [Installation]. 5th Auckland Triennial. Artspace Aotearoa. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://janetlilo.com/2013/08/25/right-of-way-2013-documentation/>

Figure 39. Lilo, J. (2013). *Right of Way*. [Installation]. 5th Auckland Triennial. Artspace Aotearoa. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://janetlilo.com/2013/08/25/right-of-way-2013-documentation/>

Figure 40. 'Uhila, K. (2012). *Mo 'ui Tukuhausia*. [Live performance]. Te Tuhi. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://tetuhi.art/exhibition/what-do-you-mean-we/>

Figure 41. 'Uhila, K. (2012). *Mo 'ui Tukuhausia*. [Live Performance]. Te Tuhi. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://bruceephillips.com/writing/discussing-moui-tukuhausia>

Figure 42. Wulf, J. (2016). *Talanoa with my German ancestors*. [Live Performance]. Year 3 BVA group critique, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 43. (2016). *Building Better Roads panel discussion with Nina Tonga, Paul Janman, John Vea and chaired by Mark Amery*. Circuit Symposium: Phantom Topologies. Wellington City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand.

Figure 44. (2017). *Research drawings on my break at work, Pepsico Bluebird*.

Figure 45. (2017). *Research drawings on my break at work, Pepsico Bluebird*.

Figure 46. (2017). *Research drawings on my break at work, Pepsico Bluebird*.

Figure 47. (2017). *Television tuned to Aljazeera*. Smoko room, Pepsico Bluebird. Wiri, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 48. (2017). *Mock up diagram for the installation at Te Tuhi*.

Figure 49. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 50. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 51. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 52. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 53. Vea, J. (2018). *you kids should only experience this for a moment – don't be here for life like me*. [Installation]. Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 54. Apelu, D. (2012). *Slap, still image*. [Video].
<https://transoceanicvisualexchange.com/artists/aotearoa/>

Figure 55. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo, still image*. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.

Figure 56. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo, still image*. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.

Figure 57. Taulangau, M. (2019). *Polopolo, still image*. [HD Video]. Image credit: Matavai Taulangau.

Figure 58. H.E.P.T. (2013). *Cultivate*. [Live Performance]. Exhibition: Colloquies of the Unrecognised Worker, Hawkes Bay MTG. Napier, New Zealand.

Figure 59. D.A.N.C.E. Art Club. (2012). *D.A.N.C.E FM 106.7*. [Community Engagement]. Erupt Festival. Taupō, New Zealand.

Figure 60. (2013). *The Roots: Creative Entrepreneurs, Ko Au Te Awa project*. Glen Innes, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 61. (2016). *Upside down Hawaiian Flag*. University of Hawaii at Manoa. Honolulu, Hawaii.

Figure 62. Vea, J. (2017). *she sows this 'āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'āina, still image*. [Video].

Figure 63. (2017). *Filming, she sows this 'Āina with her younger siblings, yet she cannot inherit that same 'Āina, on my mother's property*. Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 64. (2016). *In a hale with Imaikalani Kalahale*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.

- Figure 65. (2016). *You can hear the highway over the mountains*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Figure 66. (2016). *Bushwalk to Imaikalani Kalahahele's studio*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Figure 67. (2017). *Filming Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't with Jimmy Wulf, Robert George and Matavai Taulangau*. Mount Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 68. (2017). *Maungarei Stonefields Archaeological sign*. Mount Wellimngton, Auckland New Zealand.
- Figure 69. (2016). *Archaeological site, Maungarei Stonefields facing Maungarei (Mount Wellington)*. Auckland, New Zealand.
- Figure 70. (2016). *Imaikalani Kalahahele's studio*. Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Figure 71. Broderick, D. (2019). *Cory Kamehanaokalā Taum, Beneath Concrete, 2019*. [Floor Installation]; *John Vea, Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn't, 2017*. [Video Projection]. Group Exhibition: like drawing a line in the sand at the ocean's edge, Hessel Museum of Art, New York, USA.
<https://ccs.bard.edu/museum/exhibitions/482-like-drawing-a-line-in-the-sand-at-the-ocean-s-edge>
- Figure 72. (2017). *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't, still image*. [Video]
- Figure 73. (2016). *Lopeti Toetu'u and Su'a Sulu'ape Toetu'u Aisea at Soul Signature Tattoo*. Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Figure 74. Vea, J. (2017). *Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't*. [Video Installation]. 2017 Honolulu Biennial, Honolulu, Hawaii. Image credit: Honolulu Biennial.
- Figure 75. Vea, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.
- Figure 76. Vea, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 77. Veal, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 78. Veal, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 79. Veal, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 80. Veal, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 81. Veal, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 82. (2019). *Workers on their lunch break in the mall*. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 83. Veal, J. (2019). *Section 69ZD Employment Relations Act 2000*. [Installation]. Solo Exhibition: If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Sydney, Australia.

Figure 84. Veal, J. (2019). *If I Pick Your Fruit Will You Put Mine Back*. [Installation]. Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia.

Figure 85. Veal, J. (2019). *Oranges with stickers referencing visa and wage conditions of seasonal workers programs in New Zealand and Australia*.

Figure 86. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?: Participation with the installation*.

Figure 87. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?: Participation with the installation*.

Figure 88. (2019). *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back? installation opposite the Carriageworks Markets*. Performance Space: Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia.

Figure 89. Thompson L, W. (2012). *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*. Hopkinson Mossman. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://hopkinsonmossman.com/exhibitions/luke-willis-thompson-3/>

Figure 90. Thompson L, W. (2012). *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*. Hopkinson Mossman. Auckland, New Zealand. <https://hopkinsonmossman.com/exhibitions/luke-willis-thompson-3/>

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Appendices

Links to written texts and publications about my art practice during the PhD candidature

ABC News. (2019, Nov 5). *Pacific migrant workers the focus of confronting artwork by New Zealand-based Tongan artist John Vea* by Teresa Tan. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-05/pacific-migrant-workers-artwork-by-tongan-artist-john-vea/11664882>

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Artlink. (2019, Dec 1). *The future of work: Public Share and John Vea* by Altair Roelants. Retrieved from <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4805/the-future-of-work-public-share-and-john-vea/>

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Images of the Exhibition *If I pick your fruit, will you put mine back?* (2019)











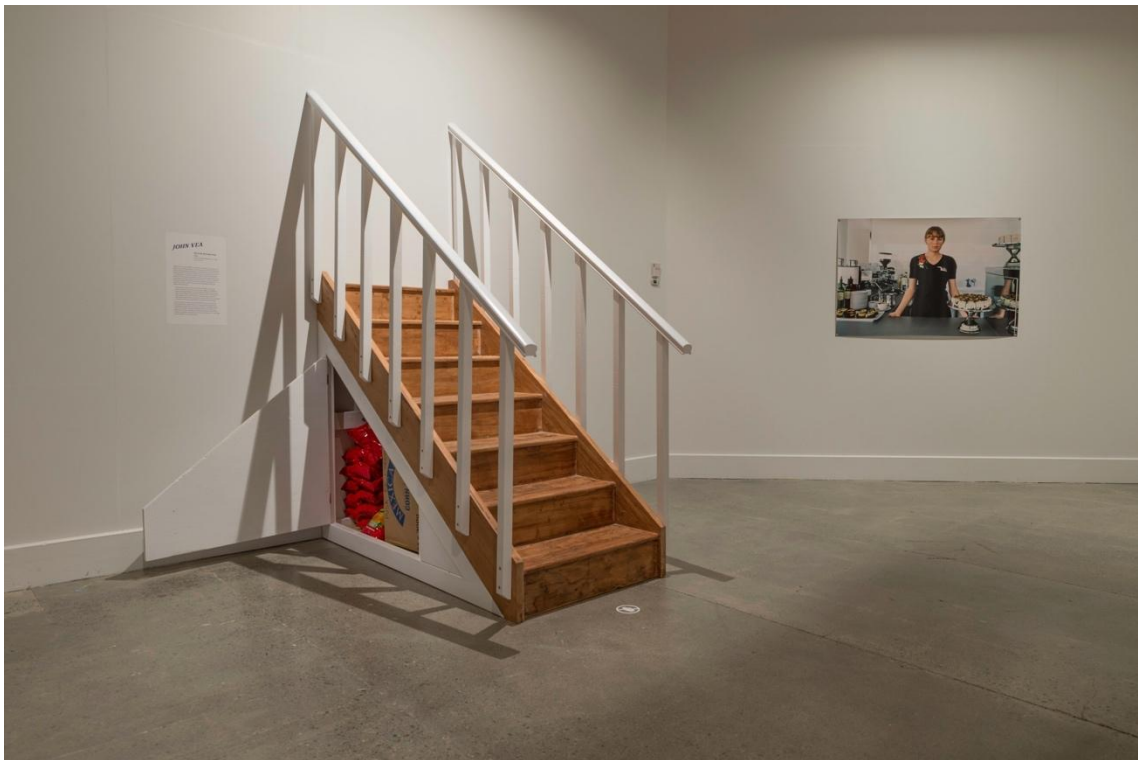
Images of the art installation *Not to be sold separately* (2019)

This artwork was part of the group exhibition 'The future of work' (2019) at The Dowse Art Museum, Wellington, New Zealand.









Images of the art installation *if you build it, they will come* (2018)

This artwork was part of the group exhibition ‘(UN)CONDITIONAL IV’ (2018) in partnership with The Physics Room, at Ashburton Art Gallery, Ashburton, New Zealand.



A place where newcomers to Ashburton can market their traditional dishes from their home Countries and share it with the Ashburton Community.

The food court becomes the common ground, a neutral space for all walks of life to share stories and connect with different cultures.

Every weekend - Different newcomers family occupies the food stalls - Diverse cuisine.

Newcomers Kitchen: a food court to share food and culture.







NEWCOMERS KITCHEN

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