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# Indigenising research: Moanaroa a philosophy for practice

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## ABSTRACT

Growing interest in Pacific issues has meant a surge in Pacific research across the globe. Sadly, some research on Pacific people has been done without Pacific knowledge, wisdom and culture. As Pacific researchers, we understand the importance of outputs that interweave our ancestral and cultural wisdom, whilst centring and privileging our people's narratives. Through the birth of our Moanaroa Pacific Research group, we explore the importance of a research collective which decolonises and re-indigenises research as we know it.

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## Introduction

As members of this network, we tell our story.

Pacific people have a long history of being research subjects, who were researched on and spoken about within academia by non-Pacific people. Foreign academics such as Margret Mead and Derrick Freeman have built their scholarly legacy and careers from commentating on Pacific people, as cultural experts (Alefaio, 2018; Freeman, 1983; Mead, 1928; Schoeffel & Meleiseā, 1983). Sadly, non-Pacific academics such as Mead and Freeman have added to the silencing of Pacific people in academia, through extracting our voices and presenting them to the outside world, as if us as Pacific people are not capable of presenting our own narratives. Research practices of Pacific people being researched by non-Pacific academics has continued upon our migration outside of the islands. Today, one can still see Research on Pacific diaspora communities led by non-Pacific researchers. As a result, Pacific community leaders and academics have called these actions into question. What is problematic in these instances, is the absence of Pacific cultural knowledge, language, and wisdom within these research projects (Fainga'a Stanley & Enari, 2023). As a result, some of the research which is done about us by others, continues to perpetuate incorrect and inappropriate representations of us.

## For Pacific-by-Pacific research

As the Pacific population in Aotearoa continues to grow, so too have the number of Pacific University graduates around the country (Enari & Matapo, 2021; Naepi, 2019). The increase of

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Pacific people going through the tertiary system has also meant an increase of Pacific researchers. As a result, we have had our voices and ways of being implemented within the New Zealand Tertiary sector, in ways that have previously never occurred. We have seen growth in Pacific research theories, frameworks, and initiatives in the past 30 years (Tualualelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019). This has allowed for our cultures and ways of being and knowing to start being implemented in research, done with our communities and by our communities. As Pacific people in the tertiary sector, we acknowledge our important role in ensuring our Pacific ways of being and knowing are present to inform policy and research.

### ***We needed a research group***

As Pacific staff at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), we knew the importance of establishing a group that centres and privileges our Pacific knowledge. Throughout our discussions we agreed that we wanted to establish a space that advocated for Pacific-led research. We realised the importance in Pacific research that foregrounds, honours, and incorporates Indigenous Pacific knowledge, methodologies and practices across the dynamic multiplicity of cultural expression/identity and research orientations (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Ka'ai, 2005; Matapo & Enari, 2021; Smith, 2019).

We knew the best way to do this was to grow research led by Pacific individuals and communities, ensuring their direct involvement in the conception, implementation, and dissemination of research projects. We also wanted to create a space that nurtured relational communities of research practice that encourage innovation, transdisciplinary collaborations, and the interrelatedness of Pacific Indigenous philosophies.

### ***The birth of Moanaroo***

*In the heart of the Moana lies the tapestry of our ancestral wisdom, interwoven across generations. Roa is the unbreakable bond that tethers us to our roots, guiding our steps as we journey into the future.—Leali'ifano Professor Albert Refiti (Our people – Moanaroo – AUT, 2024).*

Through the many conversations, filled with laughter, debate and tears, we established the Moanaroo Pacific Research Network. The name 'Moanaroo' encapsulates the vast intraconnect-edness of the 'Moana', the Pacific Ocean, while 'Roa' embraces our deep time and history, and enduring ties to our shared past, present and future landscapes. Moanaroo exists to honour and realise the expanse of Indigenous Pacific research, underpinned by the wisdom of those renowned Pacific Indigenous scholars who have travelled before us and the rich continuum of Moana Pacific knowledge, and ways of being and perceiving. As Pacific academics, we believe the spirit of Moanaroo connects and affirms Pacific diaspora communities within Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.

### ***What is Moanaroo to us?***

As an Indigenous research group, we privilege and centre the voices of our members. We employ auto research, to allow those in our group to speak on their research journey and what being in Moanaroo means to them (Ellis et al., 2011; Letherby, 2002; Roth, 2005). This form of cascading individual narratives not only allows for a deeper understanding of the perspectives of members of our groups but is also a culturally appropriate way to ensure their voices are heard, on their terms (Enari, 2021; Stewart et al., 2023).

## Vision Moanaroa

Yvonne Ualesi

Auckland University of Technology

A vision for Moanaroa's future provokes a re-imagining of research for and by Pacific/Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa NZ. Moanaroa is a collective vision that enables Pacific-Led research that grows, nurtures, supports and provides capacity building opportunities for Pacific researchers. Additionally, cultivating culturally affirming relationships, advocacy and partnerships, I see va relationality where tautua (service) is central, that is, nurturing relationships through alofa (Ualesi, 2021). I am reminded about the stories of my parents, Aunties and Uncles who sought a life of 'hope' in this land of milk and honey.

Their stories, malaga (journey) in the diaspora carry their parents and ancestors stories of the broader history of colonial administration of New Zealand and Samoa, in particular the Influenza pandemic in Samoa 1918, the Mau movement and Black Saturday 1929 to name a few. I think about the words of the colonial power who seized Samoa from the then German occupation who felt the need to civilise and control Samoans seeing them as 'a splendid but backward Native race', with 'no thought for to-morrow, and no vision as to the future of these islands' (Ministry Culture and Heritage, 2014).

As a lecturer in initial teacher education, I cackle. With my big loud brown voice and voluminous hair at the audacity of 'that' colonial lens. I think about Moanaroa and a conch shell response. My Southside lungs filled with Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa who embodies all that I-we are, thousands of ancestors charging alongside me within this indigenous ocean in our Moanaroa va'a-vaka. My conch counter-narrative sings ...

Moanaroa Remix

We are

A splendid forward Native race!

In resplendent blue-green and seafoam ie lava lava

With audacious aspirations in our brown excellence with deep thoughts for to-morrow

Trailblazers and visionaries super nesian poly style

Nurturing, growing, strengthening!

Sustaining futures of these islands

We are

Moanaroa

## Health for Pacific

Radilaite Cammock

Auckland University of Technology

My research journey began while studying towards a Masters of Public Health at Otago University. My masters took me back to Fiji where I explored the emergency obstetric care services available to women. It opened my eyes to the value of doing health research in the Pacific. I was born in Fiji and migrated to New Zealand when I was 9 years old. Going back for my masters and then later for my PhD provided a reference point from which shifts in cultural belief systems for Fijian women could be explored and understood. Coming from a Fijian family of 11, and being one the youngest, I never had the same experience as my older siblings, who were more versed in the language and had more exposure to Fijian cultural society. Although I left Fiji when I was younger, I have been able to find my way back through my research. This is particularly evident in the indigenous Fijian or iTaukei knowledge and belief systems that I have come to value in my work. Recently I published a paper alongside my Fijian colleague Malcolm

Andrews, reflecting on how a Fijian research value system could be framed for methodological use and the implications on research practices in Fijian communities (Cammock & Andrews, 2023). The paper posits itaukei concepts of vakarokoroko or respect, veiwekani or relationships and veiqaravi or service as integral in conceptualisations of Fijian research paradigms. These values are incorporated in the teaching (Cammock et al., 2022) and research (Cammock et al., 2021) work that I am involved with. The privileging of Pacific pedagogy and worldviews in academia is crucial in moving to more culturally responsive solutions to Pacific health and wellbeing. The Moanaora network and philosophy provides the space to be able to make these realisations within tertiary educational institutions and across various disciplines. These help to serve our communities in a more culturally sustainable and mana-enhancing way.

## Voice & visibility in Australia

Inez Fainga'a-Manu Sione  
Griffith University

The Australian Referendum in 2023 determining whether or not our First Nations people of Australia should be given a voice in the constitution regarding decisions concerning them, has had a profound impact both on our First Nations people and their allies. To receive a No from 60% of Australia has left many shattered and voiceless. A week of silence was upheld by the First Nations leaders driving the Yes campaign after the referendum outcome. It is this silence that continues to haunt and penetrate at the psyche of many. We have had to dig deeper back into our roots and heritage to find hope. What it means for me to have connection with the Moanaroa research group of Auckland University of Technology is a lifeline received from across the Tasman, symbolic of the strong ties that the ANZAC had forged. As an early career researcher with both First Nations and Pasifika heritage, this is significant as it means there is a space where our voice and visibility matters. Where we can continue to hold our Indigenous knowledges as an important way of knowing, being, and doing as we navigate forward from an Australian Pasifika context (Fainga'a-Manu Sione, 2023; Fainga'a-Manu Sione et al., 2023, 2024). In my considerations, the truth be told, Indigenous people have always held voice and visibility within our own knowledge systems that have been in our DNA for thousands of years. It is this voice that we draw from now as we navigate forward, not bound by the racist borders of our nation, but by the vastness of our oceans.

## My Kava Journey

Hilda Port  
Auckland University of Technology

Seafarers, pioneers, its innate in my culture  
Modern day explorer and maverick of the academic nature  
With my tupu'anga firmly entrenched in my vaka  
I transverse kava waters in search of an answer.

*Women drink kava. Oh no it's for the men.*

*If a lady drinks kava she'll be like one of them.*

In secrecy, she'll faikava where judgment can't reach her,  
Freedom to live her beliefs make kava the sweeter.

As she reveres the women from her history's cast,  
Kava'onau and Faimālie's legacy echo from the past.

As the muted women's voice swell like the force of a tsunami.  
*It's my right, I am from 'Eueiki, it is not for men only!*  
*Kava is in me; it is part of the person I am.*  
*I am a woman personified, distinct from any man.*

These women faikava is more than a drink.  
It's a means to connect with her ancestral link.  
As, I paddle my vaka through unchartered kava waters.  
Navigating with purpose, to honour, these mothers, and daughters.

To enhance her rights and the freedom to choose.  
To preserve her culture, and never to lose.  
Faikava, her birthright, she may choose to partake.  
Her heritage, her choice, her decision to make.  
Her voice that was once presumed to be muted.  
Now echoes with strength, no longer refuted.

## **Tofi tauave a le Moanaroa**

Juliet Boon  
Griffith University

Moanaroa as a collective term implies holistic. Conceptualization of the term pays tribute to decolonising labels when we Pasifika people are referred to the 'Others' by those palagi who have made us the subject of their research. Moanaroa is a term that has been created 'with' 'by' and 'for' Pasifika scholars, staff, students, and the community allowing inclusivity of our voice within academia. It is equitable move towards us making a place in Aotearoa in empowering and enlightening Others about our tofiga in our faasinomaga, our contributions towards the tofā aanolasi of our faa Samoa epistemology, ontology, and axiology. It is a collective term that has been created by us and for us to realise our potential in this faaagatama o le faaaliga mafaufauga o le tofā manino.

As a research network, Moanaroa provides us with the space to disrupt what Jacoba Matapo refers to the 'hegemonic ideals' which have been universally accepted as the 'norm'.

In this space, we as Pasifika people are provided with the platform, the marae to feel at ease to talanoa, fofola le fala, faafaletui, and feel open mindedness e faailoa le uputaua to 'write our own' story 'by our own' people, 'with our own' communities and for our generations to come. Moanaroa is a space to 'grow our own'.

In telling 'our own' story in the Moanaroa we are provided with justice to make the wrong right—our contribution to validate and claim our indigenous right. It is an opportunity to ensure that our languages, way of life, heritages, measina, practices, and beliefs are sustained and not extinct ina ia mafai na ae ai tatou tupulaga fai mai.

## **Moving forward**

As a group we believe the most effective way forward is to provide capacity-building opportunities for Pacific researchers. We aim to do this through investing in the professional development of Pacific researchers, including postgraduate research students through mentorship programmes

that are specific to Indigenous Pacific aspirations. We also plan to provide opportunities for workshops and grant/funding to support Pacific-led research. Strengthen University wide networks to enhance knowledge sharing and professional practice and provide operational support.

We also aim to continue cultivating culturally affirming collaborations, advocacy, and partnerships. Support collaborations that recognise the importance of valuing and centering Indigenous Pacific knowledges, perspectives, experiences, and practices within the tertiary sector. Advocate for reciprocal, respectful research partnerships that embody Pacific cultural values and ethical principles in research practice. We acknowledge and advocate the importance of Pacific research being led by Pacific people, for Pacific people. Moanaroa is a safe space for Pacific research collaboration, on our terms within our communities and amongst allies. We also use our platform to stand in solidarity with other existing Indigenous research groups and support the formation of others both here in Aotearoa and around the world. For our ancestor's knowledge, wisdom and legacy shall live on forever, both among our communities and within the walls of academic institutions. Alofa atu

## Open review

### Standing in solidarity

Patrick Thomsen  
University of Auckland

Pacific academia is at exciting cross-roads in Aotearoa-New Zealand. The arrival of Moanaroa as an Indigenous Pacific research collective at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), joins initiatives like the Pacific Early Career Academics Network (Thomsen, Tuiburelevu, et al., 2021) and Fofonga for Pacific Research Excellence at the University of Auckland (Triponel, 2023). These initiatives are much needed, designed to enhance, develop, and promote Pacific research centring Indigenous Pacific ways of knowing and being in Aotearoa's largest Pacific city.

Despite Pacific peoples comprising roughly 8% of this country's population, we represent about 3% of the academic workforce (Ministry of Education, 2023). Equity issues aside, this is a situation not only alarming for the lack of diversity at the front of our university classrooms, but one that also leads to a lack of diversity of knowledges available to Pacific and non-Pacific students alike (Thomsen, Leenen-Young, et al., 2021).

As the authors rightly point out, Pacific peoples, much like Indigenous peoples globally, and those of the global south, have been studied, prodded, and misrepresented by Western researchers for centuries (Smith, 1999). A complex history underpinned by asymmetric power relationships emanating from colonisation, settler-colonialism, violence, cultural and literal genocide; intertwined and underpinned by missionisation and unchecked capitalist nation-state systems of politics and trade.

Research collectives like Moanaroa, which act as a platform for centring Pacific Indigenous knowledge in scholarship are crucial. At its core, research is an activity that seeks to generate knowledge. And while positivists and the scientific method have contributed much value to what we know of the world around us in a variety of contexts, this has tended to come at the expense of Indigenous ways of knowing and being—where our peoples' knowledges and voices can easily be dismissed and relegated to the realm of myth and legend. Where story telling as a technology of knowledge transfer can be debased as conjecture; made unworthy of academic attention. Leading to some Pacific scholars feeling as if their academic life exists within a colonial 'knowledge prison' (Leenen-Young et al., 2021).

This paper challenges this by centring the voices of Indigenous Pacific scholars at AUT, with a nod to the interconnected nature and transnational spread of contemporary Pacific worlds

(Thomsen et al., 2022); by including within its membership a perspective of an Indigenous Pacific scholar based in Australia.

The significance of this paper is that rather than attempting to ‘fit’ the academic norm, so-to-speak, the authors speak truth to their story through poetry, reflection, storytelling that emphasises connection, and fusing it with existing knowledge that draws its significance from both lived and scholarly experience.

In this way, it can be said that the authors are engaging with Pacific knowledge systems, plural—as the basis of an inclusive style of scholarship that meaningfully acknowledges through praxis, pluriversal forms of knowledge that exist across the world.

Whilst the repositioning of Pacific knowledges at the centre of academic spaces is much needed to ensure our peoples’ worlds stay salient to our next generation, the next step for all Pacific researchers, is thinking through how our scholarship will be able to be told through our own Indigenous languages. And the role that scholarship like this will play in establishing our place and unique perspective within a rapidly globalising world, while contending with the exponential growth of information availability.

The Moanaroa team are well-positioned in this regard, with their considered name practice, their focus on emerging Pacific scholars predominantly raised in the diaspora, and their emphasis on knowledge as *tautua*—or service in Samoan—to our communities.

## **Ruth (Iute) Faleolo (La Trobe University, Deakin University)**

### **(Re)claiming our narrative**

The Moanaroa Pacific Research Network promotes, through their recollections in this article, a depth and breadth of intraconnectedness amongst Pacific peoples, including our academics and researchers. These fellow Oceanian scholars, as co-authors, have meaningfully selected words for the title that captures the essence of their message; to own the creative research process.

The term ‘indigenising research’ means to take the full process of research—from design and collection, to reporting and meaning making—under the protectorate of those being considered, the Indigenous knowledge holders. Indigenous practitioners and academics of the Moana (Ocean) are the rightful researchers of our Pacific peoples’ knowledge; for they are co-creating within natural rhythms and spaces of living, under a collective authority. For far too long Pacific peoples have been the object of non-Indigenous research, written about by outsiders who have ‘no skin in the game’ as they lose nothing when our knowledge has been torn to shreds by their Westernised research practices and mis-interpretative deficit theorising (Banivanua Mar, 2015; Faleolo, 2023; Faleolo et al., 2024). Thus, this call to research, record and share our Pacific ways of being, knowing and doing in a culturally responsive, respectful, and reciprocal way is not a new one, yet the authors here give a timely reminder.

This drive to move from theorising about indigenising research, to practicing indigenising was something envisioned by Moana scholars who have gone before. ‘Eveli Hau’ofa (1993, 1994) had similarly called us to action 30 years ago when he emphasised that with our Pacific people’s creative agency and ability, we needed to revolutionise the education and research we require, for us and by us. He, like many other elders of the Moana challenged an evident ignorance of, and complacency with, colonial constructs and Western frameworks misapplied to Pacific knowledge and academic practice (Efi, 2003, 2014; Thaman, 2003). More recently, Leenen-Young and Uperesa (2023) echoed this same call to action—to not just theorise but put into action the indigenising of our Moana research. As a result, we are beginning to see the urgency and revival of collaborative efforts by Oceanian scholars, including those outlined in ‘Indigenising Research: Moanaroa a philosophy for practice.’

Each of the authors here agree that the act of indigenising Pacific research is simultaneously an act of decolonising our Pacific knowledge. This is often easier said than done. With many decades of surviving colonial schemes and frameworks applied to our educational processes, as Oceanians, we know that an overhaul of our previous methods and methodologies is long overdue. We need to critically assess what we apply in our research, being sure to re-vision and re-write our narratives and meaning making, for, with and by Pasifika (Chao & Enari, 2021; Fa'avae, 2023; Fainga'a-Manu Sione et al., 2023, 2024; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Uasike Allen et al., 2022).

Significantly, this article documents the beginnings of Moanaroa by outlining their project outcomes and collective contributions to the indigenising of Pacific research. The network's objective of growing research led by Pacific individuals and communities is evidenced in five synopses of Pasifika-led research spanning regions in Aotearoa, Australia, Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. Strategically, this dialogue opens up a way forward for other Indigenous researchers, willing to lead projects in their own contexts, telling their own people's story in the spirit of Moanaroa.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

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*Dr. Jacoba Matapo* has ancestral ties to Siumu Samoa and Leiden Holland. She is the first Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific at Auckland University of Technology. She is an associate professor with over 15 years of leadership in ITE and ECE and leads key Pasifika education projects, anchoring Pacific philosophy for learner success.

*Dr. Yvonne Ualesi* is a Lecturer in Te Kura Mātauranga, Te Ara Kete Aronui, Auckland University of Technology. She is of Samoan, Tokelauan and Fijian ancestry and her research interests include Initial Teacher Education, Higher Education, Indigenous Adolescent-Youth Development, Pacific Youth and Pacific-Moana-Oceania Research Methodologies.

*Dr. Radilaite Cammock* is a public health senior lecturer in the faculty of health and environmental sciences. Her research portfolio covers topics of health inequity, Pacific Health, Pacific youth wellbeing, Pacific youth sexual and reproductive Health, Pacific NCDs and Food environments and Pacific research methods in Health.

*Dr. Hilda Port* is a full-time lecturer and researcher in the school of clinical sciences at Auckland University of Technology where she lectures in the fields of psychology, and research areas of kava related practices and Pacific studies. Dr Port is a registered counselling psychologist and founder of Atamai Psychological Services.

*Dr. Juliet Boon* is the Maori and Pacific engagement Coordinator at Griffith University. Having worked in education for over 30 years, the most recent highlight is promoting the Pacific worldview as an Equity Academic for Pasifika staff.

*Dr. Albert Refiti* is a Professor and the leader in critical studies research on spatial design and architectural environments in the Pacific, with a focus on material culture and ethnography on the subject.

*Dr. Inez Fainga'a-Manu Sione* is a Community Research Fellow with Village Connect Ltd & Griffith University in Australia's first Pasifika Holistic Health Hub, co-locating inside a Pasifika church in Logan, QLD. Her research areas are Holistic Health, Decolonization, Mental Wealth, intersectionalities across sectors.

*Dr. Patrick Thomsen* is of Samoan heritage and is a Senior Lecturer in Global Studies at the University of Auckland – Waipapa Taumata Rau, as well as the Director of Fofonga for Pacific Research Excellence, the university's Pacific research platform. His research interests are transnational Pacific mobilities, Pacific knowledges and gender diversity, with a focus on the wellbeing of Pacific Rainbow+ individuals.

*Dr. Ruth (Lute) Faleolo*, is an Aotearoa New Zealand-born Tongan; descending from Mu'a, Pukotala, Houma and Ha'alalo, and raised in Otara, South Auckland by Rev. 'Ahoia and Rev. Falakika Lose (ni-Halangahu) 'Ilaiū. She is now an Australian-based Pasifika researcher of Pacific peoples' migration histories, trans-Pacific mobilities, collective agencies, and multi-sited Pacific e-cultivation of cultural heritage.

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