

Living between cultural spaces: A journey from fear to love. A  
*talanoa.*

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## **Abstract**

Constructing a cultural identity when living between cultures is often a confusing and complex psycho-social and cultural experience. The aim of this dissertation is to inquire into this human phenomenon using my personal experience being born and raised in Tonga, in a predominantly Tongan culture for the first seventeen years of my life, before migrating to New Zealand in 1986 and finding myself in a marginal culture. Readapting to a new home environment led to deep questions about love, acceptance, cultural identity, and belonging within myself. I am now fifty-four years of age and attempting to explore this phenomenon for the first time.

The complexity of the experience involves ongoing negotiations between my past and present competing differences and loyalties to what I have come to believe the world was, and the need to understand the different dynamics at play in that process. There is no self-discovery journey that does not expose oneself to new frontiers, and new depths and heights of both grief and understanding, thus, this process brings to light multifarious psycho-socio-cultural strands in need of being woven together to make sense of the resultant combined cultural environment.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

This research study has been produced by myself and represents my own work. Any work of another person is appropriately acknowledged. This work did not involve any unauthorised collaboration, nor has it previously been submitted by myself, or any other person or author, unless authorised. I did not use any unfair means to complete this work. I understand that the above obligations form part of the University's regulations and that breaching them may result in disciplinary action.

Signed:

Date: 18/5/2023

## Acknowledgements

There is a Tongan saying, *Ko e koloa 'a e Tonga ko e fakamālō*, which translates as Tonga's only possession is to give thanks.

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*

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And to all of you who have contributed to this weaving and *tui kakala*, *I am even poor in thanks, but I thank you all anyway* (Shakespeare & Hibbard, 2008).

**Table 1**  
***Tongan language Translations***

fakamālō	to give thanks
fī	plait; braid or weave
fonua	land, country, people, traditions; grave; placenta
fua 'o e fonua	the produce of the land
fungani	top row of flowers on an ornamental girdle; first-rate/best
hoositea	white horse
ha'i 'a e fonua	binding the land, people, and traditions
kafa	girdling rope
kakala	sweet smelling flowers and plants of any kind
kava	plant (piper methysticum); drink from its pounded dry roots and stems
Ko e koloa 'a Tonga ko e fakamālō	Tonga's only possession is to give thanks
koloa	possessions
loto	inside
luva	to give or devote or sacrifice one's all
mā	bread; shame
mālō 'aupito	thank you very much
manga	to step across; to branch out; to stride; to become divided
maile	girdling myrtle plant
mā-tonga	Tongan-bread
mā'ulu'ulu	group sitting dance
moana	ocean
nau	pronoun meaning they, them and their
ngā	to cry bewailingly
noa	zero; nothing/nothingness; deaf

Pālangi	European
pukepuke	hold/holding
pukepuke fonua	holding on to the land, traditions, and people
tala	to tell; story
talanoa	to talk; to tell; story
ta'ovala	waist-mat
tō'angaseti	jet-landing place; airport
tui	threading
tui kakala	threading/weaving of the sweet-smelling flowers and plants
tupu'anga	ancestry
'umu	open earth oven (similar to hangi in Māori)
vā	social relations and space
vaka	boat; canoe; ship

**Table 2**  
***Māori (and other Pacific languages) Translations***

aroha	love
fania	Samoan version of fonua and whenua in Māori
marae	Māori meeting house
noho marae	overnight marae stay
pepeha	a way of introducing oneself in Māori
turangawaewae	a place to stand; a sense of identity and independence associated with having a particular home base
vanua	Fijian version of fonua and whenua in Māori
waka	Māori version of Tongan vaka
wharenuī	Māori meeting house
whenua	Māori version of Tongan fonua



## Chapter One: Introduction

In this research, I am asserting my mixed ancestry, being of fifth generation English, American, and Tongan descent. Both my parents have *Pālangi* (European) blood. In their Tongan lineage, they hail from the villages of Fua'amotu and Kolomotu'a in the main island of Tongatapu, in Tonga. In search of better homes, both our Tongan and *Pālangi* ancestries had made some crossings in their *vaka* (*waka*) across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, to beach us in Tonga, which we call home. We, the later generations, continued finding new homes, which has always been in our blood. We did not always hear the stories of our ancestors' experiences of their journey from one home to another. This research is a story about my home-finding journey, how I experienced and made meaning of living in between homes; a journey that has shaped my personal and cultural identity. At first, I thought the story was exclusively mine, but as this exploration has unfolded, I have realised that the past generations of my family, and those who will follow, live together in this one story.

Through fear and love, simultaneously, my story is woven, and I wish to share both its pain and pleasure by drawing from our rich Pacific indigenous ways of knowing the world to inform and guide the narration of my personal story. In my methodology, I have used a *Talanoa* research framework, which weaves in other indigenous concepts such as *tui kakala*, *fonua*, and *vā* as well as aspects of our ocean-based culture of wayfinding to give meaning to the experience, thus deepening my sense of belonging.

This story is woven on a *Talanoa* framework methodology, embodying selected but relevant phases of my personal life experiences. I hope to reflect a sense of the composite meaning of *talanoa* in the weaving and, in return, I emerge with a deeper knowledge of what this really means for me. The research includes a discussion, which includes a sharing of my own findings and, before the conclusion, some recommendations are given in relation to the research.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

Considering my Tongan ethnicity, direct personal involvement in the phenomena, and the self-reflective nature of the research, I have proposed a Pacific, and especially, Tongan indigenous research framework, *Talanoa*, as my methodology. *Talanoa* methodology was originally framed from a Tongan perspective in which underpinning ideas are rooted in our shared Pacific indigenous culture (Vaiotele, 2006, 2013/2014). This methodology is now widely implemented in research work and proposed as an appropriate method for researching Pacific-related topics including personal, social, and identity issues (Tecun et al., 2018; Vaiotele, 2006) which form the focus of my research.

In simple Tongan language, *talanoa* means to talk, or telling, or a story itself (Churchward, 1959). From a research perspective, *Talanoa* is an indigenous framework that interacts without a rigid hegemonic structure, weaving in any relevant information about how knowledge is produced, as well as re-producing knowledge (Vaiotele, 2006). It is a personal encounter where people make stories about their issues, realities, and aspirations in unrestrictive ways, allowing open discussion and negotiation, thereby allowing the personal encounter to form its own creative path (Tecun et al., 2018). A hegemonic structure implies that there is a fixed destination, but *Talanoa* infers possibility beyond what is known. This allows for a unique potentiality that offers spontaneity, creativity, and indigeneity in weaving stories that arise from deep within the *loto* or heart (Vaka, 2014), and drawing from any relevant source of knowledge to explain the events in the story and make meaning from those events, thus leading to a deeper and more meaningful learning from the experience (Tecun et al., 2018). In this way, *Talanoa* resembles the nature of talking therapy and the mysteriousness in psychotherapy, thinking the unthinkable, having faith in the possibility of healing and understanding that it carves its own shape and path, moving in its own time (Coltart, 1993). As part of my Master's degree in Psychotherapy, this research is a psychotherapy journey, my journey, and I trust that *Talanoa* will hold me centred while my story carves its own path narrating the concerns of my enquiry.

As a cultural concept, *talanoa* derives from a Pacific cross-cultural ancient oral tradition of storytelling that is inherent in our every social encounter, from formal oratory protocols to

everyday informal conversations, anywhere in society (Tecun et al., 2018; Vaioleti, 2006). *Talanoa* crosses over and back between our Pacific worlds, embodying our shared way of knowing and languaging our way of being through stories and protocols, in which meanings are expressed in cultural concepts and metaphors (Makasiale, 2007). This cross-cultural nature of *talanoa* identifies with our migration history and the cultural crossings referred to in my story. Meaning will be drawn from cultural concepts and metaphorical sources to make sense of the experience in my research.

One significant underlying cross-cultural concept embodied in *talanoa* that has a substantial relevance to my enquiry is *fonua* in Tongan, which is equivalent to *fanua* in Samoan, *vanua* in Fijian, and *whenua* in Māori, which can be translated as land, people, tradition, place, and more (Fareilly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012, as cited in (Tecun et al., 2018). *Fonua* also means earth, grave, and placenta in the Tongan language (Churchward, 1959). For any life to begin, it must have its roots in the earth, where everything dies and returns to, reflecting the collective wholeness of the universe and the cycle of life. It binds the beginning and ending of life together giving me a sense of inclusivity, continuity, and a non-fragmented and circular way of being. The concept of *fonua* reminds me of the abundant harvest of crops throughout the year, in the way my father used to produce food from his plantation farm back in Tonga. *Fonua* nurtures us and without it we cannot survive. We normally refer to crop harvests as *fua 'o e fonua*, meaning the produce of the land. Metaphorically, this term also means the young generations of the now and the future. When I think about this connection, it makes me feel rooted to a collective and continuum lifeforce as if the universe lives within me. In the same way that placenta forms my beginning, the concept also carves out something innately personal and uniquely mine, which is my psyche, but still rooted to a continuum bloodline, giving me a sense of my individualism and collectivism co-existing together. This knowledge is vital for my personal, social, and psychological wellbeing (Ka'ili et al., 2017; Mila-Schaaf, 2013).

As Pacific people, we are deemed to be ocean people who have navigated and traversed the vast ocean space since time began (Hau'ofa, 2008) relying only on our ancestral knowledge and clues provided by nature to find land far beyond our horizon (Barclay-Kerr, 2016). The fundamental key to finding their ways was first knowing where our ancestors had sailed from and already seeing their destinations in their minds (Matapo & Baice, 2020). Such knowing is not just an intellectual aspect of being, but also a deep soul knowing of people, these two are one and inseparable from *fonua*, which is depended upon for survival. In other words, they are

inextricably interwoven with their *fonua* to become not the people of the land, but the *fonua* themselves, and vice versa synonymously with the Māori proverb, *Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua ko au*, meaning I am the *fonua*, and the *fonua* is me (Green, 2021). Knowing where we have come from is knowing who we are. I hope that *Talanoa* methodology being embedded in our ancient wisdom will show me the way to know who I am and how to sail my raging sea from deep within my soul.

In our Tongan culture, the concept of *fonua* is embodied in our *kava* ceremony, a cultural protocol that involves *talanoa* and drinking *kava* (a Pacific traditional drink made of dried pounded *kava* plants' roots and stems mixed with water). I grew up hearing the *talanoa* of the origin of *kava* in Tongan history as being about a human sacrifice of love and respect by a commoner couple for their king many centuries ago. There was a couple living in a small island with their only daughter who had leprosy. One day, the king went out on an excursion and stopped by this island and while he was resting, his men went out looking for food. It was during a time when food was scarce in the island. This couple heard of their king's visit and went to fetch their only root crop saved to cook for him, only to discover that the king was sitting with his back leaning against it. Having lost all hope and fear of failing their king, this couple had no choice but to sacrifice their only daughter to fulfil their obligations to their king who, upon learning that his unexpected visit had inconvenienced his people, called back his excursion and left the island. Hence, this sacrifice was left buried in the soil.

After a period of time, *kava* was a rooted plant that sprouted from the earth that bore this human sacrifice. It was later presented to the king, who learnt of the *luva* meaning love or devotion or the sacrifice of one's all (Churchward, 1959), which was made for him in this sacrifice out of respect. Love and respect then became underlying Tongan values and *kava* formally became the drink embodying these values. The *kava* protocol is performed in variant forms depending on the occasion and who the protocol is for, but it always involves men seated in a circle drinking *kava* made in a wooden bowl with coconut shell cups, and *talanoa*. Metaphorically, *kava* is referred to as the *fonua* giving it a composite meaning binding all that Tonga stands for in a cup. So, when our men drink *kava*, we drink the earth, ocean, land, people, place, values, and traditions to affirm and to remember who we are. *Talanoa* methodology is built upon these *fonua* and the *kava* framework and, as the *talanoa* unfolds in my research, deep buried experiences will sprout to the surface from my *loto* (heart), which will feel extremely exposing and confronting. However, I trust that this process will also unearth rich and nurturing cultural

values and beliefs, sacrifices, and family patterns that I need to reconnect with to know my-self better.

In essence, *talanoa* is a concept of love, empathy, and respect that binds people with the *fonua* (Tecun et al., 2018). In using *Talanoa* methodology I call together all of what makes me the Tongan Pacific person that I am, to help make sense of my experience. I share the belief that when underlying values are drawn upon in researching subjective phenomena, the meaning will deepen and it will remind us who we are, where we have come from, and where we are heading (Teaiwa et al., 2021; Vaioleti, 2006), a knowing that comes from deep within our mind and soul. I have learnt through other supervision that when we do not know ourselves, we do not have a mind and when we do not have a mind, we do not have an identity. This aligns with our wayfinding culture that a deep knowledge of who we are is the compass that shows us the way forward, and also links us back to our roots, enabling us to address and face the challenging issues in our contemporary world (Barclay-Kerr, 2016; Fox & McDermott, 2019). Knowledge has a powerful influence over our lives as we use it to know and imagine ourselves (Mila, 2016). With that understanding, I hope to grow and deepen my mind and soul through this research journey, for in knowing who I am I will have the balance to quiet any fear my 'one hull canoe' may encounter and feel the love in the ocean undercurrents propelling my canoe to traverse the big wide ocean of my world and trust the path along which it will take me.

This research journey embodies wrestling with issues of belonging. Being stuck and lost were frequent stops I made at different stages, sometimes for a prolonged period, thus slowing my progress. There were times when my direction was blurred, and I could not discern from the accumulated information that I had gathered what my *talanoa* was, what needed to be spoken and heard, and where I was going with my knowledge and journey. Out of that confusion, it felt safer to bring everything on in fear of missing something or being left behind, but at the same time it did not feel right or satisfying. Leaving and returning to it was a constant remedy and so did adding to, changing, and rephrasing it every time this happened. I then realised that perfectionism was driving my process of reflecting on my life of living under scrutiny, a life trying to fit into hegemonic frameworks that resulted in ongoing discontentment. This internal feeling symbolises the essence of the experience of living in between spaces which is a life on the margin with a deathless wish to be accepted and fully belong somewhere.

Feeling on edge makes me crave what is not quite there. The restlessness of it creates a tendency to want to master, to quiet and, if possible, eliminate anything that I cannot control. I did not quite understand that the margin or the edge can never be mastered because it is but an entry point that fosters growth (Teaiwa et al., 2021) and a transitional space to grow into a new form (Baisnee, 2018; Tamaira, 2009). When we try to master the edge we block the creative flow of energy, which gives it its very life. It is ironic that understanding the edge is an exchange for a deeper understanding of life. Perhaps it is similar to viewing the horizon and wishing for what lies beyond as potential solutions to our problems, but the edge keeps its distance no matter how hard we try to move closer to it. I suppose it is natural to crave the unknown that we cannot grasp at the edge, but the known and the unknown are divided in the same way as the horizon divides up the earth and the sky; it is only the viewpoint that creates the boundary or the distinction. Similarly, I ponder on the word 'belonging' and how 'longing' can never be removed from it as it gives 'belonging' the essence of what it means.

I resonate with the difficulty of trying to master the edge in my trying to explain a personal experience that is shaped by more than one cultural influence. This is an onerous task that can never be understood from one single perspective. The English language is enormously vast and explicit in comparison to the limited, metaphorical, and poetic Tongan language, which I speak fluently and will always be my first language. Writing a personal experience such as mine in a university dissertation framework is extremely challenging because sometimes I think in Tongan and when converting this in English, it is difficult to find quite the exact meaning, as the ideas being expressed are often better understood with a Tongan frame of mind. The real meanings of words are sometimes lost in translation. The same applies to sentence structure. Sometimes I think in a 'back to front' way that is the opposite of a 'front to back' thinking used in the English language, which affects the structure formation of my sentences. It is then that I wish for a user-friendlier way to *talanoa*, perhaps a verbal process where I could just talk without having to structure and reference my personal story or account for the ancestral knowing that I grew up with, to more easily fit the English-dominant academic standards. I believe that my own language of memory and experience are what gives authenticity to my story, hence I fear that the way I write or *talanoa* may not be up to the form and expectations of another cultural reality.

Despite the abovestated barriers, and somehow out of nothingness, I began to write, and ideas started rolling from unexpected places. As I continued to *talanoa* the path appeared and the nothingness began to give shape to something of its own. Now and then, those ideas would

snap out of my mind only to return in different forms yet again. This has been an ongoing and repetitive process and I realised that my *talanoa* research mirrors my experience of living in between worlds. When I conform in order to belong, I suffer confusion and stuckness, and when I allow myself to 'go with the flow' unexpected turns of events help to make progress.

There are times when there appears to be a clear demarcation between my *Pālangi* and Tongan world and it plays on my mind. When one comes to the fore, the other one is a ghost in the shadows. There are also other times when I find myself neither exclusively belonging to one nor the other but somewhere in between, either stagnant or unable to achieve a fluid slide in and out of each world. It is confusing and difficult to fully articulate. It often happens that when I thought I had it all figured out, I then realised that I did not understand any of it. Sometimes it feels like something has transpired into a new form or some excitement is lost somewhere in the process. It is a circular way of experience that cannot be explained in a linear way. A story like mine needs a flexible framework like *Talanoa* that allows for all ways and forms, for openness, creativity, and spontaneity as well as for death, stagnation, and failure to each take their own paths.

*Talanoa* is a combined word deriving from two words, *tala* and *noa*. How befitting the splitting of *talanoa* is to my personal experience of feeling split and deriving from more than one world. Formally, *tala* is defined as to tell, relate experiences, to ask, or apply and in essence, *noa* means zero, nothing, ordinary, of any kind and unable to speak (Churchward, 1959), without concealment (Halapua, 2002, as cited in (Vaka, 2014), or a sense of harmony (The National Centre of Mental Health Research, Information and Workforce Development, 2010, as cited in (Vaka, 2014). *Talanoa* then literally means talking about nothing in particular (Vaiolleti, 2006). Without a fixed established structure, but with a unique potentiality, *talanoa* can emerge out of nothingness or even out of a prescribed non-dynamic state, to create its own form and pathway with nothing but whatever is meaningful to its journey.

Metaphorically, *talanoa* is interpreted as "to story or dialogue in balance," or "to story or dialogue once there is balance," or "to story or dialogue in order to reach balance," a process to reach *noa* and the result of *noa* as well (Tecun et al., 2018, p. 161). The concept of balance here does not mean stagnation, but instead a constant movement of energy creating or giving birth to some new form (Tecun et al., 2018). It points to a reciprocal and symbiotic process occurring where *noa* sets the space and conditions for *tala* and vice versa. They can even become each

other. When the two meanings are well coordinated, harmony is then effected and transformation occurs (Mahina, 2010; Mahina et al., 2010). In this state of *noa*, there is nothing left to *tala* as all has been made clear and there are no more shadows left in the communicative exchange (Tupou, 2018). Similarly, one has been transported to a new place, the landscapes of meanings where the unknown is known, the unseen is seen, and the unfamiliar becomes familiar (Mila, 2016). In this research, I set out to *tala* anything that comes to mind and heart hoping that the process will transport me to the landscapes of meaning to reach *noa* – where the previously unknown, unseen, and unloved becomes known, seen, and loved.

Through the concept of *noa*, *talanoa* mediates between relations and movements navigating and neutralising conflicts thus restoring relationships between people, places, and energies with the result of holding them in harmonious balance (Ka'ili et al., 2017). This is embodied in the Pacific indigenous concept of *vā* which has been theorised and described by Pasifika scholars as “a central organizing principle in many Pasifika cultures [that] governs all inter-personal, inter-group, and sacred/secular relations and is intimately connected to a Pasifika sense of self or identity” (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017, p.163, as cited in (Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2020). Our Pacific relational system facilitates both personal and collective wellbeing, but the collective is valued over the individual self. The notion of *vā* reinforces how in relation to others the integrity of the self is shaped and realized, which indicates that the self does not exist alone and does not survive in isolation (Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2020). This simply means we are people through other people. Ka'ili (2005) delineates that *vā* means both social relationships and space and it is essential to tend and to nurture the *vā* as this act is often etched forever in the memories of people involved in the process (Ka'ili, 2005). The scholars agree that space in this context is not linear, static, or separate from time but means relationships between people, places, and the environment, as mentioned above. *Talanoa* in its mediation role drives critical multi-layered discussions and dialogue in the Pacific traditions (Tecun et al., 2018; Vaka, 2014) with the capacity to reach *noa*. *Talanoa*, then, is seen as a communication tool facilitating progress and resolve between multi-layered relations and energies in any relationships. In this self-dialogue research, I look to *talanoa* to mediate and restore any uneven relationships brought about by my multiple worlds, and to analyse the different lens through which I have come to view myself and what this means to me.



In closer examination, there appears to be a paradox in *talanoa* with an 'unknown' element in *tala* and a 'known' in *noa*, a co-existence of two disparate components that inherently contain elements of each other, an 'otherness' that gives each other its wholeness. This circular image of *talanoa* built on the above cultural concepts allows no place for dichotomy or exclusivity, only co-existence. My best writing time was before the break of dawn when the world was still and in darkness. I found my mind to be sharper at this time. Upon reflection, my constant search for belonging is also a search for stillness from the restlessness of the space in between. At first, stillness and darkness gave me a sense of void and fear, but they somehow gave me my voice when I could not find it during other times of the day. From this experience, I began to understand the concept of 'otherness' better and the inevitable role that paradox plays in our lives. It affirms the relationality of the world we live in, meaning that we are always in relationships and that nothing survives without co-existing with others, which includes the parts of us that are felt to be missing or unwanted because our integrity is shaped and realised only in relation to them. Similarly, we appreciate light through darkness and progress through stillness. Strangely but truly, I needed the darkness to see and the stillness to set the condition for the dawning of new ideas for my writing. This duality is the heart of wayfinding that guides me to find connection, and *talanoa* teaches that what may appear to be lostness can help us find the way.

In this research, the process of *talanoa* will incorporate literature as it relates, adds voice and dimension as well as gives meaning to my personal story. Chapter Four demonstrates how the essence of *talanoa* transpires throughout my own *talanoa* as it evolves from my selected experiences and how this process meets and synchronises with the literature choices that are being woven in, back and forth, to effectuate the meaning making of my enquiry.

### Chapter Three: Method – *Tui Kakala*

For literature review, I use a Tongan concept known as *tui kakala* which was introduced to research by Tongan educator, writer and poet, Professor Konai Helu-Thaman (Helu-Thaman, 1997). Practically, *tui kakala* is a process of threading or weaving sweet-scented flowers to make garlands and necklaces, to be worn on special occasions. *Kakala* means the variety of sweet-scented flowers and plants available for this art creation as well as the finished product itself. The creation of *kakala* is an exciting communal activity that involves planning, selecting, negotiating, presenting, and appreciating beauty and richness in producing the art and how a finished process generates heart-felt experiential responses by all its participants. The complete *kakala* is normally a colourful display of a variety of patterns threaded or woven together of which blended aromatic fragrances reflect the exciting sensations and amusements associated with a special occasion and the pleasure and honour felt by its wearer.

Helu-Thaman (1997) explains that *tui kakala* is a three-stage practice, namely, *toli*, *tui*, and *luva*. The first stage involves the *toli*, which translates into selecting and picking the *kakala* that match the occasion. Each *kakala* in Tonga is ranked according to its cultural importance and the suitability of the *kakala* is measured by who it is made for. In my research context, *toli* is the stage of deciding the topic and aim of the research for the researcher's own learning and for others who will also benefit from that knowledge. Deciding to undertake research and how a research should happen involves getting through different stages of that *toli* process. Accordingly, this part of the *toli* process is not only a courageous act but it also has elements appealing to the researcher's imaginations which is symbolic of the process of *kakala* picking. The sweet scent of each *kakala* has an alluring effect as represented in how multiple thoughts can start to take form in the mind of the researcher which keep branching out into more line of thoughts thus attracting the researcher to follow their lead until a final decision is made of what is worth knowing from the research and how to achieve this end. When my research topic involves my personal life, cultural identity and questions about being Tongan living in a western world away from my indigenous land, it becomes a question of what is important and meaningful for me to learn, how this knowledge is defined and how that knowledge is accessed. For that purpose, the selection process for my sources of literature here has been carried out in ways

that I understand which is conducive to my healing, culturally determined, and producing meaning to my research inquiry.

As the suitability of the *kakala* is measured by its cultural importance, selecting what is worth threading together and how to do it is vital to the rest of the *kakala* making process. In applying this to the *kakala* research process, its accuracy and authenticity depends on the data collected and ethics used to access knowledge. Moana Jackson, the renown Māori scholar and international advocate for indigenous rights and self-determination asserted that indigenous people's way of knowing and collecting knowledge is itself a distinctive intellectual tradition that has existed well before written literature was innovated (Jackson, 2016). He stipulated that this knowledge is found in our poetry, songs and history which form part of my selected literature sources. They deserve a place in my research because this is our indigenous way of knowing our place in the world, our understanding of how our world came to be and how they came to be part of that particular world. To have this knowledge is foundational to my ability to define what wellbeing means and deciding how to care for my own and those of others. In order for me to have a strong cultural identity, I have to be secure in who I am and this derives from knowing my place in the world that I live in. This security enables me to navigate my world in freedom and dignity and how to live my world the same way I decide which parts of my life need threading or weaving together in this *kakala* research. It is only then that the *kakala* becomes suitable for me to 'wear'. In this way, knowledge is honoured through the learning and transformations it has conferred upon myself as the researcher and others who may benefit from it.

These selected literature sources range from the history of the Pacific ancient world to contemporary sources using indigenous concepts to inform and highlight issues of identity and belonging. Among that selection are work of renown Tongan educators and other academic leaders from the Pacific in general as illustrated in the work of Tongan scholars and anthropologists, Professors 'Okusi Mahina (2010/2017), Tevita 'O. Ka'ili (1999/2005/2017), and 'Eveli Hau'ofa (2008). Mahina (2017) theorised the *Tā- Vā* (Time-Space) theory of reality and how we, in the Pacific view and understand time and the form of things, space and content. Ka'ili (2005) and other Pacific scholars developed the concept of *vā* further to mean the relational space in-between people or entities and including the nature of that relationship. *Vā* is fundamental to the existence and preservation of our relational and collective culture. That space in between is emphasised as not empty but relates and holds people and things together

and maintaining the *vā* gives it meaning. Indigenous related concepts of *vā*, place and space and identity have attracted non-Pacific authors including international researchers such as Valerie Baisnee (2018) and A. Marata Tamaira (2009) who have built on the concept of *vā* as the space that fills with multiple ways of being. Understanding this is vital to finding my place in my personal, social and cultural world. Baisnee (2018) studies autobiographical work of Tongan and Samoan poets and scholars, Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala-Marsh giving prominence to their writings on issues of identity where they welcome both specificity and multiplicity calling for Pasifika identity to come as they are. Locating these indigenous concepts within the lens of the *kakala* and *toli* process allows us to view multiple perspectives of these different writers essential to identity building and making sense of who we are in the space and what it means to be in a multicultural world.

Hau'ofa's work asserts a universal 'Oceanic' identity for Pacific people based on our shared marine heritage and our relationship (*vā*) with the ocean which surrounds us and on which we depend for livelihood. His philosophy of us as oceanic people who have developed sophisticated navigation skills to traverse the vast Pacific Ocean integrates with the work of other authors namely, Jacoba Matapo and Dion Enari (2021), Matapo and Tim Baice (2020), Karen Fox and Lisa McDermott (2019) as well as ocean navigator Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr (2016) who use indigenous oceanic epistemologies with reference to the concept of wayfinding to promote and guide identity formation, navigation of personal and cultural identities and leadership building in Pacific people. Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing are again incorporated as a literature source to help me find my ways across my contemporary seas. As each *kakala* is a unique fragrant on its own, the blending of indigenous concepts enriches each other's meaning through their own creative application to contemporary issues of identity and belonging.

Languaging adds a vital role in conferring and imparting meaning to my research enquiry as reflected in the effective use of metaphor in the songs and poems of our late Tongan Queen Salote Tupou III (2004). Tongan psychotherapist Cabrini Makasiale (2007) explains metaphor as a Pacific way of life and advocates for its understanding and use in the healing work with Pacific people. My identity formation process is synonymous to a therapy healing journey and is made sense in a holistic framework where cultural perspectives are equally important as the components of spirituality and faith, hence citing the work of Psychoanalyst Nina Coltart (1993), Psychotherapists Margaret Arden (1998) and Makasiale (2013) deepen the meaning making

process of my journey. Coltart affirms the possibility of healing and informs us of the mysteriousness of that journey needing time and an act of faith. Both Arden's and Makasiale's work give prominence to wholeness and symbolic meaning connecting spirituality, science, religion, and culture as meaningful approaches to healing.

The second stage of *kakala* making is the *tui*, which means the threading or weaving of the selected *kakala*. This particular task determines the purpose of the *tui kakala* and to achieve this, it involves careful and *skilful* sorting and arranging of the right types, amount, and combinations of *kakala* to form patterns. Helu-Thaman and later *kakala* research scholars delineate that this is the analysis stage of the research process and we are looking for patterns, similarities, variations and new emerging patterns in the data collected, a negotiation phase in the process. It is common to change or correct the patterns originally planned. Questions are being asked at this stage if the selection of literature makes sense, where is the solution and if this is addressing the research enquiry, and is it meaningful. This is where knowledge from a wide range of literature and selected lived experiences are sorted and arranged in relationship with each other, ready to be woven or threaded together. Facilitated by *talanoa*, the sorted and arranged literature and data collected in this research embody indigenous wisdom, history, and culture transported between time and space in the forms of stories, memories, dreams, songs, poems, proverbs, prayers, arts, imaginations, and relationships that could interpret and give meaning to my experience within a Pacific and Tongan cultural context. As the weaving and threading begin, the patterns start to take form through the sharing of those rich authentic stories, deep emotions, and theorizing, thus resulting in a cultural synthesis of information (Helu-Thaman, 1997).

Weaving in the work of Professor Teresia Teaiwa (2021) together with others on relatable Pacific and identity issues sheds new light and depth to the discussion of 'on the edge' stuff that forms part of my experience. I consider all the selected authors as boundary breakers within their own minds, who have skilfully navigated similar uncharted waters for me to follow. Their work has been creative inspirations for they reflect the different fragments of who I am. The intertwining of their worldviews and different but relevant approaches has been nurturing during my identity formation. It deepens my knowing of who I am when I know which story I am part of.

As a last stage, *luva* is the giving away of the completed *kakala* to the wearer, or a gifting from one wearer to another, a gift given with a heartfelt sincerity, humility, and honour. *Luva* is associated with the notion that a great deal of work and sacrifice has been dedicated to complete the art creation being gifted, hence, giving the concept of *tui kakala* a sense of wholeness. The gifting of the *kakala* signifies how we maintain the *vā*, our relational space, through the expression of our cultural values of *'ofa* (love and compassion), *faka'apa'apa* (respect), and *fetokoni'aki* (reciprocity and responsibility for each other) (Churchward, 1959). Such actions and meaning permeate the *vā*, and through *luva*, those cultural values are being transmitted between the giver and the receiver of the gift (Ka'ili, 2005). If a *kakala* is not gifted, the reciprocal essence in maintaining the *vā* is missing and therefore loses its meaning and purpose. Through the simultaneous acts of weaving and threading, gifting, and receiving, the *vā* is established, maintained, and strengthened.

In the *kakala* research context, *luva* is presenting the findings of the complete research and gifting the knowledge that has been reproduced through hard work and sacrifice. The honour of wearing this *kakala* is in returning the gift of knowledge to the people who had given the knowledge, participated in the research, as well as benefitting from it.

## Chapter Four: *Talanoa*

*May my mind come alive today  
To the invisible geography  
That invites me to new frontiers,*

*To break the dead shell of yesterdays,  
To risk being disturbed and changed.*

*May I have the courage today  
To live the life that I would love,  
To postpone my dream no longer  
But do at last what I came here for  
And waste my heart on fear no more.”*

~ John O'Donohue ~

“A Morning Offering” – Benedictus

### **Chapter 4.1: Who am I?**

Mila (2016) asserts that *identities matter so much because identity is where the psychic and the social meet. Identity is connected to deeply personal feelings about belonging, exclusion, acceptance, and rejection in the social world* (Mila, 2016).

I first encountered the question ‘Who am I?’ in my first *noho marae* for my Psychotherapy training in 2013. We were asked to formulate a *pepeha* and read it out. Elder (2020) explains that *pepeha* evokes *aroha* and grounds us with a deep connection to our ancestors and the natural environment. In my Tongan culture, this is a similar type of acknowledgment although not in exactly the same form, and it introduces the speaker and grants them the right to speak in

the space. With that understanding, I see *pepeha* as verifying a secure relationship between the speaker and their home, a feeling in one with one's mountain, ocean, river, and *whare nui* (meeting house) when reciting it. Metaphorically, it lays down a welcome mat on which we can then discover how we are connected through the stories of people and places in the world thus making our identity very clear (Dr Elder, 2020).

I did not have any of those feelings or understandings in mind on the day, but something touched a chord deep within my psyche for the first time and I realised that there was a lot about myself that I did not know. I was confronted with a simple question that dug deep to my ancestral roots and I did not know how and where to reach out and feel about myself. Lostness befell me. Within my inner world, this disconnection felt like pain. However, at the same time, it was an awakening experience! Psychotherapy has since allowed me to embark on an inner navigation seeking out my *turangawaewae* (place in the world) so that I could feel and stand on its *aroha*.

It is rather intriguing that it took another culture to open my eyes and discover that I was lost in relation to my own culture. We were told in our history that Tonga is the only island in the Pacific that was never colonized, that the Tonga that I grew up in was predominantly Tongan, traditional in its ways and seems to be unaffected by issues relating to the outside world. I assumed everybody else felt the same as me. I held an all-knowing attitude about culture and did not expect to be confronted by cultural issues the way I was in my first *noho marae*. Caught unaware, I was exposed to something unknown as if I was stepping into a new frontier and it felt frightening.

We have a Tongan word for stepping, *manga*, which is translated as to branch out, become divided into two or more branches, to step across or over, a stream, and to stride (Churchward, 1959). On that note, let us branch out and divide *manga* further into two words, *ma* meaning bread and shame and *nga* meaning to cry bewailingly. My paternal grandmother and many of my elders, including my father, have *talanoa* to me about how *ma-tonga* (Tongan bread) was made in the olden days. In times of excess harvests, people would preserve plantation food in preparation for times of famine or post-cyclone by storing food underground. The *ma-tonga* was a survival food.



The process involved first digging a hole in the ground, then covering the hole with thick layers of banana leaves before layering peeled crops like cassava, taros, and bananas on top of each other to fill up the hole. Then the top of the hole was covered with more thick layers of banana leaves before burying the food with soil. This food would remain underground for many months. In times of need, they would dig up this food product already well fermented and mix it with coconut cream, then wrap it in banana leaves ready to be cooked in an *'umu (hangi)*. They talked about the bad smell that the *ma-tonga* first releases when dug up, but also that the taste of the cooked finished product is delicious (Statham, 2013).

The meaning of *manga* is very symbolic of my cultural identity journey, which is a mix of twists and turns, layered and preserved, for survival means hunger, desolation, buried deep underground, unpleasant when dug up, longing to be rooted in the earth, shame, branching out and crossing over, streaming in and out of uncharted waters, and lamentations in need of consoling and containment. Somewhere in the past someone said that to find one's authentic self, one must go beyond what is already known and familiar. I had no idea what this meant when I first heard it. Considering the feelings associated with the experience this compliment would be an insult. I can see the truth in this now. They say experience is the hardest kind of teacher because it tests us first, and provides the lesson afterwards.

Our Tongan relational system informs us that we live in a continuum of stories from which we can use other's minds, knowledge, and discoveries to find our own, and to consider and know who we are (Mila, 2016). For that reason, despite feeling that I have been stripped bare, I am grateful for my *marae* experience as the starting point of digging up and confronting my well-preserved fear, bias, and prejudices, as well as tending to the unmet longings that I did not know I had and which were preventing me from becoming my authentic self. Culture was teaching me how to be human so that, in order to begin on this self-discovery journey, I had to be laid bare as I was in my mother's *fonua* (placenta) and empty out my pre-formed mind to allow knowledge to enter and take its own path. Teaiwa (2001) writes about emptying out the minds and taking in new knowledge to facilitate cultural growth, referring to this process as 'losing the edge' that we feel we must, prefer, or fear to occupy. Something has to die to start a new beginning (Teaiwa, 2001). I am reminded once again that psychotherapy is sometimes a process of rebirth. I must be formless in my mind and heart, and have faith in *noa* to carve my identity remaking.

Some of my first and hardest learnings taught me that we all have a need to be loved and accepted but this is obstructed when we only see others in our differences. Equally so, we can lose ourselves in our sameness. I think about entering the marae that day, a sacred place embodying the heart and soul of Māori culture, and how naive and preoccupied I was, thinking that Māori culture was the same as mine and that nothing would surprise me. Outside the marae, I have always seen myself as different from any other culture. Upon reflection, I chose to see myself as different or the same whenever it suited me. This was a defense to make me untouchable whenever I could not face the unwanted feelings of not fully belonging in the majority space. The marae experience has taught me that culture is unavoidable and always present, whether announced or unannounced (Dalal, 2006), and that there is wisdom in knowing that we know nothing.

#### **Chapter 4.2: The Dreams at my Birth.**

Baisnee (2018) affirms that *talanoa* is a way of naming, shaping and reshaping the self and self-empowerment. Naming creates a relationship and preserves the memory of the relationship between people and places, connection and displacement (Baisnee, 2018).

When I was born, my father registered my name as Senolita Nai but he made it known to the family that my full name was Senolita Meliame Finau Nai, while insisting that I be called Finau. Senolita is a foreign name in the Tongan language and was not even a namesake at the time. Names in the Tongan culture bestow meanings and are stories in their own right. They are either gifted or given by right. My father explained that the name was how the Americans properly addressed their ladies. At the time, Nai was already a Tonganised version of our *Palangi* family name, Nye, from two generations prior. Naming me Senolita made him feel connected to our ancestors in America where the family name Nye had originated. Meliame Finau were my paternal grandmother's names and traditionally I would have been expected to carry her names because my father is her eldest son, as I am my father's eldest and only daughter. Woven early on in my foundational years were feelings of ancestral disconnection, ambivalence, and a denial of true self. I was expected to provide a remedy for an existing inter-generational lostness, which was desperately in need of being found.

I grew up fully aware of my full names and became attached to being called Finau. However, when I was in Year 6 at school my first legal registered name took precedence. Finau started to diminish, and I had to readapt to Senolita. By then, my father had already joined the big migration of Tongan unskilled labourers to New Zealand to work during the 1970's economic boom. Migration costed my parents their marriage. Immigration divided our family up, separation was taking its toll, and this became the starting point of many displacement experiences for me.

Life was full of unanswered questions, sadness, and longings. I was taken from my mother and my familiar home in our rural village of Fua'amotu when I was nine years old and placed with a few temporary family caregivers to pursue education in the city area of Tongatapu. It was normal for children of emigrating parents to relocate homes and have interim caregivers awaiting reunion with their parents, if lucky. Idealisation of the Pālangi world with better material possessions became a mitigating factor in our separation. From our edge of the ocean, the grass was always greener on the other side and to get there a crossing had to be made (Teaiwa, 2001).

Ironically, my father never liked hearing me being called Senolita and I have never heard him call me by the name that he gave me. I have always felt a mixed sense of fantasy in the name. He would explain that he gave me a *Pālangi* name because he had dreamed of a better life for me, followed by grave regrets for having messed with the traditions in the first place because he feared the extinction of his mother's memories with the silencing of her names. The realities of living between two worlds were unknown to him of course, but he somehow dreamed that there would be a fluid transition for me.

My father's ambivalence created enduring conflicts and confusions in me throughout my life. I was named and then unnamed. My young psyche could not work out where I belonged, if I should be feeling special, or if there was something insufficient about me. It was inevitable that I would live my own intergenerational lostness but the load of also carrying my father's lostness weighed heavier on me. I grew up believing that my father invented me, and I was commissioned to follow his dreams. I despised it.

I do not remember whether I fully embraced the name Senolita when I had to take it on. Carrying a *Pālangi* name was idealised in my Tongan world, but the ambiguity of it all deprived me early on of any sense of belonging to it. There was also a slight shame about my name when I thought of it being associated with cowboy movies. As time went by, I came to shorten Senolita to Seno and made it known as my preferred name, slowly becoming known by the name I had renamed myself with. The feeling of ownership over my name somehow anchored me and so my love for all my names started to materialise.

I grew to value my grandmother's names more. In the Tongan language, Meliame means Miriam and Finau does not mean anything in particular except if I were to divide it up into two words, *fī* meaning plait or weave and *nau* being a pronoun meaning *they*, *them*, and *their*. It just dawned on me while writing this that the combined meaning resonates so well with the weaving and *tui kakala* of my *talanoa*. Interestingly, the position of Finau sits in the middle, the *vā* that represents co-existence and the relationship through which I understand myself, and the *vā* to be nurtured (Ka'ili et al., 2017). Finau in the *vā* separates my names, yet connects them together, almost saying that I can never be one without the other. I feel closer to the different parts of me that are represented by my names as if I am alone in the middle of the ocean drawing all the land of my ancestors towards me (Tamaira, 2009; Teaiwa et al., 2021). This knowledge makes memories meaningful.

In preparation for my dissertation, I had written so many notes as soon as ideas and thoughts emerged in my mind, which became tangled in a web and created a challenging task to unravel and theme them together. Life on the edge tempts me to keep attaining and stall awakening, leading to overly collecting materials for self-approval. I stumbled upon this poetic piece below that I had forgotten about, but now feel compelled to weave in, as it was written at the time, and because I am making new meaning of it now.

*But I am all those names.*

*Why make one reign over the other?*

*Why despise one, yet dream of the other?*

*Can't the two be integrated,*

*And transition fluidly?  
When you despise one,  
You despise me.*

This piece hardly had any emotions attached but as I began to read it time and again, I am suddenly swooped into some deep buried emotions that have never surfaced in me before. I am literally crying and it feels like I am inside the heart of an emotionally fragmented young girl begging somebody more powerful than she was to see, hear, and feel her longing to belong by accepting all the different parts represented in her names, as she was each and all of them the same. I now realise that I am this love-starved young girl still yearning to be loved and accepted by my father for who I really am speaking through the poem. The pain of this is so intense and consuming but I also feel that I have made a huge *manga* into the landscape of meanings with this new realisation. Getting in touch with this long-suppressed feeling for the very first time neutralises some past uneven energy in need of restoration. The fragmentation between *mā* (bread and shame) and *ngā* (wailing uncontrollably) has been *tui* (threaded) together, resulting in a feeling of my *ngā* being soothed and the *ma* nourishing my long-drawn hunger to be loved and accepted.

By renaming myself and identifying my feelings, I have now reinvented myself (Baisnee, 2018) and this feels powerful for me. The second verse of my poem below speaks from a recovered position through the healing experience. I am beginning to take root and am branching out to touch my history and feel it's aroha. The third verse affirms a strong sense of connection and belonging to my ancestry, with an increased self confidence that I will be okay from this point on. I realise now that both verses send a strong message of claim and defiance to my father and I am asking him to trust me.

*So, I tala all my name  
Whenever I speak in public  
I must enforce it,  
I am Senolita Meliame Finau  
The total sum makes me whole.  
And less fragmented*

*I feel rooted and anchored.  
When I'm tied to my fonua  
My grandmother lives in me.  
So do I, in my family history  
I'm in my ancestors' dreams.  
I know I will live on  
So will my progeny!*

### **Chapter 4.3: The dreams of my ancestors**

My genealogy reveals that I am fifth generation of American, English and Tongan descent. Both my father's great grandfathers were *Pālangi*. Joseph Nye was American and Sam Parker was English. On my maternal line, my mother's great grandfather was George Prescott, also from England. We know that they arrived in Tonga by sea in the 1800s, but much of what happened in between time and space after that is scattered history or, otherwise, a silent topic. All my *Pālangi* ancestors' names were Tonganised to Nai, Paaka, and Pelesikoti. By my parents' generation, everyone was born and raised in the Tongan lifestyle. I can deduce that my past generations only related to what they knew and understood at the time. At least the Tongan translations still sound the same as their original names and are not a total erasure. We all struggle to belong and fit into the environment we find ourselves in, hence, we choose what to remember and what to forget for the need of our survival.

I can only wonder why they decided to cross oceans and chose Tonga as their Pacific home; how they were welcomed; how they experienced being in the minority culture; whether they suffered marginalisation as I did; did they feel alienated; were they idealised and had an easy time, and how that was for them; what was it like to have left their family and history behind in search of something new; did they ever have a certain pain because of this, like I feel at times; and if so, how did they deal with that? One of my *Pālangi* ancestors remarried and left Tonga for New Zealand with a new family. I wonder what made him leave part of his family back in Tonga;

did those family members choose to stay back themselves; who lost and forgot whom; how did it feel to be left behind and abandoned?

Living with mysteries evokes a feeling of unfinishedness in me and a yearning not only to know, but also to capture the unknown. The sound of another supervisor's voice rang hard in my ears that if I did not know my core, I could not begin to write. In my frustrations in being stuck, and with the slow progress of my thesis, I began to realise what 'not knowing my core' involves. Without these wonders I would not have the different pieces of me to weave into my *talanoa*. Where do I begin and how do I end? Searching for who I really am needs acceptance of the missing parts and the unpleasant pieces that I despise. Still looking through a fractured lens at times, I often find myself drifting from one world to another and sometimes ending up 'sitting on a fence', not knowing which side I should land on or how to pick up where I have left off.

Psychotherapy has taught me that the closer I get to my self, the closer I am to my trauma. Now that I have started to dig deeper into my history, I feel that I have a closer relationship with my self and with my ancestors than ever before. It is a feeling of being held by a deeper understanding. The wisdom in my supervision has also taught me that there is an indigeneity in Psychotherapy, a place to begin growing from and return to when we need to be reminded who we are. I may not get to fully know my core but I now understand that we do not have to be egocentric and know it all. After all, our core also consists of holes; our lost, forgotten, and hidden parts, while also realising that there is edge and deep understanding that exist together. This awareness helps us slide in and out the different parts that make us ourselves. I am reminded that our path is not always a straight line but a spiral and we continually come back to things we thought we understood, seeing deeper truths.

I accept that our families and wider Tongan Polynesian diaspora cultural heritage is migration. We are always looking for what is beyond the horizon. I can see the value of finding a new home here with the boundless opportunities New Zealand has to offer, but we have travelled far from our ancestors' way of seeing and being in the world. We are far from the languages, stories, and landscapes that interpret and give meaning to our experiences, which make them more challenging than ever before. But healing is not entirely futile, when we understand and

accept what our collective history stands for, we can then begin to learn to live consistently with a condition of change rather than experiencing change as the swing from one static situation to another.

#### **Chapter 4.4: The weavers of the dreams**

*Ehara taku toa I te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.*

*My strength is not as an individual, but as a collective* (Māori proverb)

The weaving and *tui kakala* of my family history reveal common patterns at every turn marking separation, disconnection, and abandonment accompanied by sadness and sorrow. However, dreams and resilience remain a prevalent aspect throughout the pattern. In the weaving and *tui kakala*, the weavers and makers choose the patterns. Both of my grandmothers were pattern makers in their own way. One was a weaver and the other was a tailor by profession. They had already lost their husbands and became the family matriarchs by the time I was born. I grew up knowing my extended families, myths, and legends as they *talanoa* them to us, the younger generations, while applying their hands to what they did best. My mother later became sick and had to be sent to New Zealand for better medical treatment. Meanwhile, I had already been placed with my paternal Aunty's family as arranged by my father. She, too, was a weaver. While everybody was on the move to New Zealand my grandmothers and this paternal Aunty stayed back. I am most grateful for these intermediary mothers whose ongoing presence provided a sense of stability and home for me.

I was sent to my grandmothers, alternately, during my school holidays. It was a repetitive cycle of reluctance to go at first, followed by reattachment, only to return in the middle of it as I was supposed to as if I was part of some commodity exchange, except nobody was reaping any profits from the trade. The world outside me had no idea of how much restructuring was going on in my internal world but the consistent availability of my two grandmothers and aunt gave me a sense of me and them that remains the same. All my intermediary mothers' physical weaving and sewing skills were transferred onto my psychosocial world that was *ngā* and desperately in need of comforting through ongoing weaving and mending.



The irony of crossing the oceans in search of a better life was, for me, a life deprived of a mothering touch. When I ponder on the word *crossing* and the various meanings we could infer from it, I am overwhelmed with mixed emotions. All of us have made some crossings one way or another in search of something better, but in doing so we also have been crossed. The Christian tradition teaches us of the greatest sacrifice made on a cross signifying life and healing after death and brokenness. To be better than what we are, we must make some crossings in life. The dreams of a better life perhaps superseded any idea of the extent of the sacrifice we would suffer, and so the migration pursuit must edge forward. To begin a new life, the old one must be crossed out or take up another form.

Psychotherapy has taught me the concept of mothering and how essential this is in our lives, let alone in our work, and I began to see the depth of how much was crossed and crossed out for me. I only saw my brokenness, but gradually I also saw that broken pieces can become a beautiful pattern if allowed to be woven and mended. This knowledge enlightens me to see the value of our collective sacrifices in various forms and proportions. To weave these together, some fragments may be too small, fragile, and difficult to hold, and so a thread can still sew through them and add on to the overall pattern. Where there is a will, there is a way.

For consolation, all the mothering I have received is being carried over in the weaving and sewing that all my 'mothers' have gifted me psychologically, and in which I have inherited physically through my parents. The more I translate my issues into these stories, the more I find meaning in my brokenness, my heart opens further to see my own mother as a fragile piece to be tended to with love and acceptance, and I recognise that she too, had paid a high price for her own crossing. Out of brokenness and not by choice, sacrifices have been made for others and I too can do the same. Through our collective suffering, we weave into our continuum wisdom patterns of love, resilience, and looking into the future. I embrace our migration history in honour of all my 'mothers', the weavers of our dreams, who have entrusted me to keep our stories alive lest we forget and repeat the painful past.

## **Chapter 4.5 Our migration dreams**

*To win will have losing in it*

*To be found will have had lostness in the journey*

(A realisation from my psychotherapy study)

Migration is certainly in our blood, as *moana* (ocean) people. Our Polynesian ancestors' wayfinding skills of crossing the vast ocean relying only on memorised navigation techniques and deep knowledge of the language of the stars, the wind, and the ocean to reach their destinations speak to their unique way of being, intelligence, and unwavering faith in what was beyond themselves (Hau'ofa, 2008; Martins, 2020). To have deep knowledge in the unknown is to live life in a paradox, and takes a leap of faith to interpret and find meaning in it. It speaks to the truth that life is inconclusive and undetermined, and we can never fully know or grasp anything, despite how much we desire it.

Dreams make us fly, crossing far and wide. Our family histories have been shaped so much by constant motion across and over the ocean for generations. Something better was always calling us from beyond our horizon, easing the thought of losing sight of our familiar shores, drinking sweat and salt water on sea (Teaiwa et al., 2021) and in more recent times, the fear of crossing the sky to new homes. I imagine my ancestors' dreams and aspirations ascending with the waves and their heartsick memories sinking with the descending waves that followed. Both sweetness and bitterness echo through our migration identity.

I am intrigued with the depth of purpose and courage that made my ancestors endure such risky ventures and I reflect on my own. I am far from my ancestral home, far from our languages and interpreted path in a world overridden by a dominant western culture where I often find myself in someone else's story. However, recalling our collective encounters reminds me of where I have come from, and I imagine myself once again and find my purpose. Our collective memories take us to a place where we exist together, sharing the languages that are the raw material of our collective consciousness (Mila, 2016). Below is part of a song composed by our late Queen Salote Tupou III in which words have metaphorical meanings that rightly describe our migration heritage and the collective purpose that kept us firmly focused on the cause.

*Angi 'a e Tokelau  
Pea momo e peau  
'O fafana kia au  
Kaveinga e folau*

*...The north wind blows  
The waves break  
Whispering to me  
The theme of my voyage*

(Wood-Ellem, 2004, p. 197)

I remember my own childhood dream of migration. Tonga's only international airport is located in my village of Fua'amotu, which is nicknamed *Tō'angaseti* (Jet-landing-place). A young child playing outside would not miss aeroplanes flying over our village. Many of my relatives were already in New Zealand and I dreamed of one day flying in that aeroplane to join them. When my time came, that was my migration *vaka* taking me over and across the same ocean that my ancestors crossed.

My village also has another nickname, *Hoositea* (Whitehorse). Metaphorically it refers to the waves massing and breaking and spreading the white foam over to the shore. The sound of ocean waves breaking onto the rocks was what we slept with and woke up to in our family home every day back in Tonga. These sounds are forever etched in my memories. I imagine how we all catch different waves in our crossings. Some waves crash us onto the rocks and others lead us to dance to the rhythms of the sea.

#### **Chapter 4.6: Shattered dreams**

Actor James Franco said, *Dreams and expectations also have the very dark flipside of disappointment, broken dreams* (Franco, 2013).

I arrived in New Zealand at seventeen years old in 1986, charged with so much hope for an all-pleasant new life in 'the promised land'. But no, the image of milk and honey was but an illusion. I was confronted with a painful truth that my parents have been battered and lost to the effects of migration. Their lostness devoured all my idealisations of a better life in New Zealand and dreams of being a family again.

My father was heavily addicted to alcohol and domestic violence was his common outlet. On the night of my highest hopes, he greeted me under the influence of both and my heart just sank to some irretrievable depth; it stayed submerged for a long time. I begged to return to Tonga in my first week, but I did not stand a chance. The migration movement was only one way. My mother's escape was to keep the peace and, by doing so, she became completely unavailable to me. I felt conflicted, isolated, and abandoned again. My reality was being stabbed and I was in pieces. We never addressed the complex way in which we had found ourselves, and some of us are still oblivious to the causes and effects of our sorrow. I have now lost my mother and the matter remains silent with my father. The task of storing up my shattered dreams transports me back to the lyrics of this *mā'ulu'ulu* (group sitting dance) again composed by our late Queen Salote for my old high school in Tonga, Queen Salote College:

*Hehenga si'ete fakakaukau*  
*'O fekumi na'a ma'u ha feau*  
*'O e loto kuo kafo he manatu*  
*He 'aho ni mo hono feinga tau*

*My poor thoughts stray*  
*In search of solace*  
*For my heart is wounded by the memories*  
*Triggered by this day and its task*

(Wood-Ellem, 2004, p. 249)

I search for interpretations of my experiences, and I find myself returning to our ancient language in songs and stories to help me find my feet and navigate my way. Singing and

dancing to the same composition in my pre-migration years meant nothing, but memories now are filled with different ways of seeing the world. Green (2021) writes that this is the peculiar thing about memory; it shifts and reshapes itself when meaning reveals a new or different understanding to our past experiences (Green, 2021).

#### **Chapter 4.7: Living the dreams.**

I was unprepared for the unknown and was in for a cultural shock indeed. Despite the initial setbacks, there was still a sense of collectivism in the dreams when families looked out for each other and continued to do things together. We have been taught to be there not just for our own individual entity but for the totality of the whole hub. I found comfort in the company of family members who had arrived and paved the way before me. Their unfailing attendance mitigated my lostness.

For the first time, I saw myself as different in the society I was living in. The shift from invisibility to being so visible was so exposing yet so unseen in a marginal community. Being different became more and more prevalent and spoken about as the years went by. With the different forces operating in society, it was hard not to lose myself in the dominant culture's story of being associated with everything deficient and unacceptable. In struggling to belong, it felt safer and easier to see myself how the dominant world saw me. I have had my turn of attacking my own culture then defending it profusely when I felt attacked, creating a dichotomic sense of myself.

At home, the split was as confusing as in the outside world. I was expected to achieve high level of education, yet my father despised of me speaking English, and still does to this day. He claimed to be a man of all time who understood the modern world, yet his own unresolved fear became a total war to fight from the home-front. Living the dreams became a migratory grief for quite some time. There were so many contradictions and multiple emotional trials to endure. Instead of immigrating into one different world, I found myself further fragmenting into different worlds. The *vā* is further described as an intermediary site, a transitional space, or a liminal zone marked not only by conflict and transformation but also confluences and connections

(Tamaira, 2009). From where I stood at the time, everything was conflictual and did not make any sense at all.

The complexity of belonging and not belonging alike is that we lose and gain at the same time. We lose an edge when we do not belong, or grow into something new and acquire new understanding, and then they change again. We always experience grief in letting go of what we thought the world was. There are always ongoing negotiations in the *vā*. We continue to learn from the wisdom in paradox; that is, the best parts of us and the shadows that we do not want both live on the same continuum and draw strength from each other. I have learnt that, rather than struggling to put ones' self over another, it is really about finding our strengths through each other. Living in the space between has felt like a solo journey for me but I realise that through other people, I have come to realistically realise myself. So, there is value in being, and feeling, alone after all.

#### **Chapter 4.8: Giving to the dreams**

When we dream of better homes, we mainly mean better education, health, and material possessions. Despite the pain that comes with the journey, migration has rewarded us with the opportunities we came here for. Our parents started out in New Zealand from scratch. They had no money and barely spoke any English when they arrived. All they set out to do was to find work and to bring us over. Out of nothingness they carved our path and laid it at our feet. We were constantly reminded of our purpose, that we had to give back to our dreams and sacrifices.

As a member of the second migrant generation, I became the first qualified lawyer on both sides of my family. It was a dream fulfilled, but my brokenness saw no value in pursuing this dream as nothing appealed more to my wounded soul at the time than for it to be healed. I was on a quest searching for that healing, leading me to this path. I have learnt that without life's mysteries, sacrifices cannot survive. Through sacrifices we came and through sacrifices we continue to stand hand in hand for our dreams.

As a member of the third migrant generation, born in New Zealand, my son just recently became our family's first medical doctor. This achievement is a phenomenal milestone as it signifies not only an arrival of a personal and individual, but also a collective, journey. The arrival of this journey could not have found a better time than now to add meaning to the *talanoa* of our dreams. The metaphorical drinking of sweat and salt water from those breaking waves has never tasted any sweeter than now. Migration was a path well worth following. I see ourselves as having been loved and dreamed forward. These are the stories that stay with us, the lifelong *kakala* that we *tui* and *luva* to each other, the same stories that give us deep connections to our new homeland we currently walk on and eat from.

In celebrating the graduation of my son, a small wooden anchor was carved by a carver uncle of mine, to be girded to my son's waist mat, a symbol that he is anchored to our *tupu'anga* (ancestry) and our family heritage of shared dreams and sacrifices. For the three different events that my son attended as part of his graduation celebration, he wore different *ta'ovala* (waist mats) woven or gifted by the weavers of our dreams and other mother figures of our bloodline from our family home in Fua'amotu. His *kafa* (girding ropes) were plaited from human hair of three generations namely, my mother's, mine, and my daughters'. I plaited some new hair ropes and added to the original *kafa*. His *kakala* (floral necklace) was a mix of New Zealand flowers and evergreen leaves of a Tongan plant called *maile* which is a type of girdling myrtle (Wood-Ellem, 2004) that I grow in my home garden. The *tui kakala* has been *luva* in a circular way where all generations have been woven into this reality through our collective sacrifices and stories.

In the Tongan culture, our *ta'ovala* and *kafa* metaphorically mean *fonua* so we can say that we *ha'i 'a e fonua*, which means we are tightly holding on to the *fonua* when we tie the *ta'ovala* around our waists. For similar reasons, the anchor was girded to my son's back symbolising that we, our ancestors, the *fonua*, and all that makes us ourselves are bound in this together. We are the *fonua* and the *fonua* is us, we are the ocean, and the ocean is us (Hau'ofa, 2008). This was also done as an assurance to my son and our younger generations that they are anchored to our bloodline, dreams, and sacrifices in the hope of deepening their sense of belonging wherever they find themselves in the world.

Through our collective *talanoa*, we are creating and co-creating knowledge. When my son understood the meaning of our doing, he wore his *fonua* and our collective dreams with pride. It is my hope that his sense of who he is will grow so that he will know where he comes from and that our ancestors dreamed us forward, for this needs to happen before he can learn to know who he really is. To know where we come from feels like growing a deep self-love emerging from deep within us. I know that there is no final destination for my journey, but I think if I were to be given a *pepeha* task again, I would approach it with love that comes from a deep knowing within my soul.

#### **Chapter 4.9: Real dreams**

I would like to share real dreams that I had while working on this thesis. I do not know how dreams come about and I am still trying to make sense of it all but somehow through the process of figuring this out, some new knowledge has transpired that has had an immense transformational effect on me. In one dream, I saw a glimpse of an ocean voyage that I understood as a big *vaka* carrying my *Palangi* ancestors. The *vaka* appeared to be ascending and descending with the big waves of the deep ocean. I woke the next day feeling a sense of closeness and warmth towards my *Palangi* ancestors that I had never felt before. It changed how I imagined them, and my wonders about their Tongan experience came from a genuine place deep within my heart.

In another dream, I saw my father, my youngest brother, and two nephews of my mother's drinking kava in my old house on the North Shore. Apparently, they have been land-keepers while I was away. One of my cousins was making the *kava* drink and they *talanoa* happily. The *kava* bowl was not the usual wooden carved bowl but a big red crab shell instead. The strangest part was that somehow, I came to understand that this crab shell was representing a placenta. I was the only one with that understanding, and I woke up feeling disgusted and perplexed by the dream.

I am however fascinated with the fact that I could embody my research in real dreams. I could not draw any meaning from them at the time and I certainly had no idea that I would finish off



my dissertation with these real dreams until now. Out of nowhere, *noa*, in its creative non-hegemonic nature, emerges at this point of the journey to open up these dreams for interpretations, bringing with it a sense of full immersion and total involvement in the dreams as real experiences, allowing me to awaken with a fresher view of the phenomena (Green, 2021).

In a composite sense, *kava* represents my *fonua*, and all that makes me who I am. Green describes the roles of *whenua* in Māori as nourishing, enriching and growing life, that we need it for our survival, and without it we cannot go on. Could this mean that my ancestors are imparting me a *tala* and assuring me that I do not have to look far, for what I have been searching for is already mine, held safely in a cup kept and guarded by my keepers. Metaphorically, when our Tongan men drink kava, they are said to *pukepuke fonua* which means keepers of the land or binding the land. I reflect on the men in my dream drinking the *fonua* as synonymous to the Māori concept of *tangata whenua*, where *tangata* and *whenua* are inextricably interwoven becoming one with the other, *Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua ko au* (Green, 2021). Both my bloodlines are represented here, assuring me further that nobody can be left out or left behind, whether dead or alive, as we all belong in this continuum together.

Of particular interest the overt appearance of my father, and my mother being represented by her nephews. She had her own subtle ways of trying to keep the peace between my father and I and I wonder if her incognito status implies that she is doing this still. Tears are flooding my eyes as I am writing this. More peculiar still, it is my mother's birthday today as I write this, May 8, and I cannot believe that I have arrived at this moment in time where dreams and memories manifest as "the literature of the spirits filled with collective answers about the inner mysteries" (Mila, 2016, p. 36) of my life, thus showing me the way to live. I have always interpreted her quiet subtle nature as a sign of weakness, but at this point of my weaving and *tui kakala*, subtle patterns are starting to emerge through and crossing over the coarser underlays I started off with, signifying the great value of patience and endurance. I feel like my mother is whispering to me that good things come to those who wait patiently.

In *tui kakala*, the finest and the most delicate of flowers are left to be woven or threaded on as the top layer. This is called *fungani* and it symbolises the best of the layers. It renders a

polishing touch, the harmonious finishing piece that gives the *kakala* creation its wholeness. My mother was not a weaver, but she was the best keeper of weavings. She had no voice but in her keeper role, she was holding on to something of great value. She could not articulate anything to me in the past but there she was holding patiently, awaiting the right time to speak to me through my intellect and my spirituality, the place I often immerse myself in for deeper reflections and enlightenment. I wonder about the metaphorical hold she represents here, could she be trying to explain to me that the mothering aspect she knew best was to patiently hold me while I delve into the deep to find anchor in my soul and emerge with this *tala* of love from the depth of my *loto* to lay as *fungani* for my *tui kakala* and this is what she has *luva* to me and wants me to *luva* to others.

The crab living on the land and in the ocean point to the possibility of transitioning fluidly from one world to another and, no matter how disgusting the thought of placenta may be, it is teaching me that my wholeness comes from knowing where I have come from. It is accepting the whole of me, not just my best parts but also the parts of me that I hated and wished to remain buried underground. Its red colour tells us that the crab has been cooked. Metaphorically speaking, our refinement comes only through enduring some heat. Finding meaning sheds a different light on this and adds more value and honour to all the crossings and sacrifices we have made to date, both individually and collectively.

I understand that my weaving and *tui kakala* does not end here as this journey is ongoing, but I want to finish off with this Tongan proverb: *Hange ha lingi lolo ki ha tahi peaua*, which is translated as Like pouring oil on a rough sea (Statham, 2013). This proverb originated from recreational fishing and, apparently, the fishermen's way of calming the rough sea is by pouring oil onto it. This metaphor speaks for the phenomenal meaning making this dissertation process has emerged with and the path *Talanoa* has taken me through. At this point in time, I reflect on the psychotherapeutic effects that this journey has given me as the oil being poured onto the rough sea I first set sail from, thus lubricating the currents to take me to rest and allow me to lay anchor in a deep calm oceanside before the next lapse of my wayfinding journey begins.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### 5.1 Findings

As I reflect on my quest to explore the complexity of being in between cultural spaces in this research project, I find that I was quite unprepared for the unknown turn of events that was unfolding. Analogous to *tui kakala*, I had in mind some idea of a pattern to start with but as the *tui* started to materialise, more patterns started to emerge which was a constant occurrence and it became the determining factor in the selection of my literature sources. Given that my research was a psychotherapy journey, the same patterns would appear in different forms until I learnt to respond to them differently. A lot of questions were being asked whether the patterns were addressing my research enquiry, and how meaningful they were. I did not foresee the depth of my felt experience as revealed in the phenomenal transformations I arrived at, although I did plan to explore it for the first time. Nevertheless, I am left with a clearer understanding that if nothing is experienced from deep within the soul, nothing of any importance has happened. I tried to explain the meaning of deep knowing from the soul at an early stage of my writing, but it changed again when I had the felt experiences storying up my dreams, and I realised how deep one can delve into and how important it is to find balance in the process to avoid drowning in one's own issues. The weaving and threading of the knowledge from the wide selection of literature sources and the reproduction of new knowledge and facilitated by *talanoa* provided that balance in this negotiation phase of my journey.

At the core of my identity issues were feelings of conflict, abandonment, displacement, disconnection, deprivation, marginalisation, shame, lostness, and longing which are best described in metaphorical terms as "Winds rise, winds fall. They stand discordant in my heart" (Wood-Ellem, 2004, p. 189). This set off the search for solutions and problems early in my exploration and so the weaving and the *tui* began. I have demonstrated the patterns in my parallel process namely, periods of stuckness, states of nothingness, feelings of being further on edge, self-doubts, and utter frustration that have been consistent barriers throughout the weaving of this research. However, the weaving kept on. As common with the *tui kakala* process, original patterns could change or rearranged, and new or more *kakala* may be required to enhance the formation of new patterns emerging during this negotiation phase. Through the sorting and arranging of the wide range of literature in relationship with my selected lived experience, my own process spoke through those selected literature resulting in deep

reflections and broader understanding of the depth of my personal process and the barriers to finding my way. This synthesis of rich cultural knowledge and wisdom shed more light on my identity issues that could not have been affected by a non-indigenous and hegemonic methodology.

With *talanoa* and *tui kakala* research, no matter how hard we try to tie the loose ends, there is always the potential of leaving some unfinished ends behind as a reality of life, and we can not fully determine anything that is meant to follow its own path. This is for somebody else to finish or pick up a loose end and give it their own twist as *Talanoa* has guided me through my states of nothingness, periods of stuckness, and lostness. I learnt that they were important pauses necessary for completing this project. Those pauses were needed to develop an ability to tolerate, and the capacity to swim through, the unexpected waves that caught me by surprise as demonstrated by research journey. As much as they were overhauling in nature, these waves transported me to calmer and warmer waters closer to shore with a clearer sense of myself. I am reminded once again that sometimes life is not a problem to solve, but a reality to experience. While our journey is ongoing, we can never fully arrive or know everything but we can be assured that we can develop the capacity to sit out the unknown.

## **5.2 Limitations and Recommendations**

With its creative and non-hegemonic nature, *Talanoa* provides freedom to translate my personal issues and aspirations into stories in any way, shape, or form that is meaningful to me, thus allowing the authenticity of my voice to be heard unfiltered by any other dominant voice. However, as I have stipulated in my parallel process, that same freedom could be felt as too vast a space to navigate around, which can be so overwhelming, thus making it difficult to stay focused on the process. It also brings with it a sense of unpredictability in its path that could trigger fear and losing faith in the unknown, let alone the process. The *talanoa* process has a potentiality to be felt as confronting and exposing but, without our feelings, we can never really tell our story. For these reasons, how can we make *Talanoa* methodology foster a more holding nature in unpacking and addressing identity issues and make it safer to use in navigating our way around when digging up deep buried matters from our *loto*? I have attempted to test the waters of *Talanoa* methodology, and it has proven to be a valid research framework capable of contributing to positive transformations for Indigenous researchers like myself. Continuous use

of the methodology will further develop it to provide better solutions for our problems and prepare future researchers for deep soul encounters.

### **5.3 Applying the dreams to Psychotherapy practice**

From a cultural perspective, I *luva* this research project for the professional development of practitioners who may find it helpful in dealing with cultural issues and storying up issues of identity and belonging in therapy. I hope that my research will assist in growing a wider understanding of the issues of migration, cultural translocation, and the deep longing of the heart from another world's way of knowing.

We ask, 'how might my *talanoa* reach out to other people's *talanoa*?' and 'how might dreams be incorporated and made part of our work in practice?' The exploration of dream works and incorporation of dreams in story telling has proven to have valuable therapeutic outcomes. It does not have to end here. Interpreting dreams by drawing from ancient wisdom does have a place in deepening our understanding about ourselves and co-creates knowledge essential to address issues that we encounter in our contemporary world.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This research paper has proven that *Talanoa* methodology has great value for conducting research in a Pacific context. With its indigenous stance, *Talanoa* methodology upholds cultural appropriateness when exploring identity issues and questions of belonging that would not have otherwise materialise through the use of any other formal structured frameworks. Built in rich ancient wisdom, *Talanoa* facilitated a process of co-creation of knowledge, fostered the weaving and threading of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual knowledge in its meaning making process, and enhanced the collection of authentic data for future research (Matapo & Enari, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, in the *kakala* research context, *luva* is presenting the findings of the complete research and gifting the knowledge that has been reproduced through hard work and sacrifice. The honour of wearing this *kakala* is in returning the gift of knowledge to the people who had given the knowledge, participated in the research, as well as benefitting from it. *Luva* as meaning sacrifice emerges as a consistent theme throughout this research as told in the story of kava and echoed through my selected lived experiences. Paying this knowledge forward is all we can afford to do. It highlights the work of Teaiwa in studying Pacific contemporary issues when she refers to our ancient navigators as 'intellectual ancestors' gifting us, in the contemporary world, knowledge through their own 'sweat and drinking salt water' sacrifices. With sincerity, humility, and honour, I am gifting my research as a completed *kakala*, and hereby hope that 'wearing' all the sacrifices made in this research, is an invitation to my readers to enter my world, sit awhile with me, and try to understand it from another world of knowing.

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