

Co-creating inclusion in research practices in the South Pacific:

Some highlights and challenges

Maulupeivao Betty Ofe-Grant,

Department of Management Technology and Organisation, Auckland University of
Technology, City Campus, Auckland New Zealand, and

Miura Elikana, Losi Sa'u Lilo, Lillian Vimahi, Seipua O'Brien and Evangeleen Joseph,

Auckland University of Technology, City Campus, Auckland New Zealand.

Abstract

Purpose – Colonial epistemes distort ideologies through power structures and control, perpetuating differences and the development of an inferior status. The aim of our viewpoint serves dual purposes: First, we advocate for Pacific and international business (IB) researchers to consider adopting inclusive research practices, particularly regarding Pacific and indigenous populations. Second, we argue that decolonization presents conflicting challenges, demonstrating that we still have a long way to go regarding the decolonization agenda within academia, the university, IB, and broader society.

Design/methodology/approach – An essay style is adopted to introduce inclusive Pacific research practices specific to the Pacific context, what that looks like, and the advantages of utilising culturally appropriate methods.

Findings – Our paper highlights some examples that justify why Pacific methods should be used, such as spirituality and prayers underpinned by the *va* (i.e., relational spaces) – a concept well-known in Pacific cultures but missing in Western academic frameworks, models, and approaches. Additionally, we found that our endeavours to be inclusive can paradoxically lead to exclusion and marginalization within academia, the university, and popular mainstream media.

Originality/Value – The originality and value of our viewpoint lie in its potential to stimulate conversations and reflections among IB researchers regarding inclusive research practices of decoloniality. Thereby strengthening the ‘trumpet-shell’ call to decolonize the field and academia, which IB as a discipline should not be immune to.

Social implications – This paper enriches IB theory and pedagogy by advocating for the co-creation of inclusive research practices in collaboration with Pacific and indigenous communities. It contributes to the broader movement to restore indigenous knowledge and scholarship research spaces.

Keywords: *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Pacific peoples, Qualitative research, Spirituality*

1. Introduction

We live in an age where global awareness regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) advocates for embracing differences, resulting in many novel approaches and solutions (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023; Newbury et al., 2022; Syed & Ozbilgin, 2020). This is evident in universities and academia where power relations rooted in colonialism lead to disparities in research practices that have heightened social justice efforts in promoting inclusion in the academy, research processes and ethnic representation (Dar et al., 2021; Lafferty, et al., 2024, McAllister et al., 2020). For instance, the “*Rhodes Must Fall*” protest movement in South Africa, spearheaded by students and faculty members at the University of Cape Town, centered around the removal of a historical statue of Cecil Rhodes. This statue served as a potent symbol of white supremacy, institutional racism, the persistent lack of racial transformation in academia, systemic oppression, and the need to decolonize education (Bhambra et al., 2018). Similarly, students at the University College London (UCL, 2014) tackled issues of white privilege, racism, and colonialism in university curriculums through their video entitled “*Why is my curriculum White?*” These examples highlight the prevalence of white privilege characterizing education in universities and a legacy of colonialism that has normalized white-authored ideas while rendering blackness or any other non-white cultures invisible (Dar et al., 2021; Peters, 2015). Consequently, universities and other educational institutions are increasingly endeavoring to address racial bias, white privilege, and colonialism in their curriculum and research design, content, and delivery. However, as highlighted by Boussebaa (2023), IB has demonstrated minimal engagement or efforts within the realm of decolonization, as evidenced by limited journal publications, scholarly discussions, and responses on the subject. This deficit may stem from IB’s focus on

corporate-centric perspectives and organizational strategies, emphasizing and advancing multinational enterprises (MNE) rather than the call for decolonization (Boussebaa, 2023; Cairns, 2019). Similarly, Zagelmeyer (2023) urges IB researchers to explore decolonization, for example, in foreign market expansion, international trade, and global value chains as starting points that can initiate discussions concerning the decolonization agenda. Such decolonizing efforts aim to allow spaces for indigenous research conducted by indigenous researchers and their respective communities of interest to reclaim and restore perspectives, knowledge and practices that are otherwise ‘silenced’ (Love, 2019; Mila, 2017; Nabobo-Baba, 2004; Smith, 2012). As such, supporting inclusion within academia and more specifically IB, which navigates dynamic and volatile contexts, should result in diverse voices, creative and alternative research designs, and methods (Sinkovics et al., 2009; Welch et al., 2002).

Historically, Pacific-based (henceforth Pacific) research has predominantly adhered to colonial and Western-centric methodologies (e.g., Hempenstall, 2017; Mead, 1928), leading to the prevalence of misinformation, challenges in discerning fact and fiction, and tensions regarding the dominant paradigms used to interpret Pacific-related issues (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019). Within this discrepancy, Pacific approaches, knowledge, and perspectives have often been marginalized, characterised as backwards and outdated, romanticized and perhaps ‘fetishized’ (Teaiwa, 1994, p.94) rather than acknowledged as legitimate, essential, and integral to the Pacific peoples' wellbeing (Ravulo et al., 2019; Ofe-Grant, 2022). Our paper defines Pacific research as research conducted *by, for, and with* people of Pacific heritage.

Pacific research practices have started to take traction in the world of academic spaces (Enari et al., 2024; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019) where more Pacific researchers endeavour to use Pacific research methods that reflect the

lived realities of the Pacific peoples, rather than utilising Western-centric approaches (e.g., Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022; Ofe-Grant, 2022; Sanga, 2004). The imposition of Western-centric ontological frameworks and research practices has perpetuated and created a lot of “epistemic violence” (Llucmetkwe et al., 2024; Spivak, 1988; Valoyes-Chevez et al., 2023) that necessitates acknowledgment and mindfulness within Western scholarship. Developing appropriate research tools is critical for upholding the dignity and knowledge of the communities being researched (Pidgeon, 2018), as advocated by renowned indigenous Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2004). Tuhiwai Smith deconstructed the assumptions, motivations, and values inherent in colonial and Western-centric research practices, emphasizing the necessity to decolonize prevailing ‘regimes of truth.’ Similarly, Gayatri Spivak (1988) advocated for truth and inclusivity, particularly regarding the politics of representation within colonial India. Her seminal work, “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” (Spivak, 1988), specifically scrutinized the actions of colonial powers and institutional gatekeepers who purportedly represented the voices of marginalized or subaltern communities. As such, the subaltern class are deeply affected, disregarded, and oppressed. These examples advocate that projects or research endeavours involving indigenous communities should have direct input in “developing and defining research practices and projects that relate to them” (Battiste, 2008, p. 503). Therefore, these communities have direct agency in how research practices should be done according to their worldview.

Unlike positivist paradigms that are ontologically based on the idea that there is one reality interpreted objectively, value-free and obtained via scientific inquiry (Zikmund et al., 2010), and is common in IB research (Sinkovics et al., 2009), Pacific research is subjective, contextual (Sanga, 2004), premised on cultural values and institutions, and the primary placement of spirituality, land, and the cosmos (Chilisa, 2012; Efi, 2007). Of extreme significance is the concept of collectivism, *aiga* (i.e., family) and *aigapotopoto* (i.e., extended

family unit), where *tautua* (i.e., honourable services) and responsibilities hold primacy, and the *va* (i.e., relational spaces) that binds all things together (Iati, 2000; Ponton, 2018). Hence, these perspectives conflict with the value-free, objective, and detached approach to research that positivist paradigms offer (Banarjee, 2022; Muzio, 2022).

Our paper is situated within a large-scale, mixed-methods research project (2019-2024) investigating the barriers and enablers to literacy and numeracy and their implications for New Zealanders (New Zealand Policy Research Institute, 2020). More specifically, Māori (the indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand) and Pacific peoples over-represent individuals living with low literacy and numeracy skills. The study aimed to provide a population-wide view of their life-course trajectories regarding economic and social outcomes, and policy recommendations for implementing effective skills interventions (Cochrane et al., 2020). The Pacific component of the study was led by an all-female team comprised of the lead researcher, a Samoan female *Matai* (Chief), and research assistants of Tuvaluan, Tongan, Samoan, and Cook Islands descent. We employed qualitative and indigenous methods encompassing focus groups and interviews framed with *Talanoa* (i.e., Tongan method of storytelling) (Vaioliti, 2006) and *Teu le va* (i.e., Samoan methodology emphasizing relational spaces) (Anae, 2016) at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Oamaru, and Dunedin. Additionally, given that this project was conducted during COVID-19 lockdowns in New Zealand (2020-2021), we offered online interviews as a measure of safety for the participants and our team.

In our paper, we highlight how we co-created inclusive and culturally appropriate practices in a research project *with* the Pacific communities, with the intention of promoting a collective approach, encouraging brave conversations, and where Pacific peoples are valued for their perspectives and knowledge and treated as such. Consequently, Pacific participants were considered significant collaborators and co-creators in this research project.

We define Pacific peoples as individuals whose ancestry and culture originate from the islands located in the South Pacific hemisphere, for example, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and the smaller islands of Kiribati and the Solomon Islands (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018). Despite the many differences and nuances between the Pacific nations, some commonalities connect these nations and their surrounding waters (Ofe-Grant, 2022). These elements include collectivism, family, land, and spirituality, serving as pillars of a shared understanding that anchors Pacific peoples in their sense of identity, that is, ‘who they are and where they come from’ (Efi, 2007). Thus, adopting a collectivist approach represents how the Pacific perceive and negotiate their positionalities (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019) regardless of whether they are New Zealand-born or Pacific-born (Ravulo et al., 2019). As our investigation progressed, reflexivity or sensitivity, became a valuable tool for understanding our evolving experiences and intricate dynamics concerning race, status, and positionality (Holmes, 2020; Piekkari & Welch, 2006) in co-creating inclusion within Pacific communities.

In our paper, we examine the significance of inclusion in indigenous research, drawing on decolonization (Smith, 2012) and indigenizing Pacific research (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). We intend to open spaces within these communities of co-creating methods that are appropriate, reliable, respectful, and conducive to enhancing Pacific knowledge and wellbeing. This inclusion is evidenced in other fields such as health (Ofanoa et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2021), education (Tagicakiverata & Nilan, 2018) and social work (Ravulo et al., 2019).

Next, we introduce the Pacific practices used in this journey for participant recruitment and data collection. Then, we address the challenges encountered in the process of co-creating inclusion and provide recommendations for IB researchers. The discussion concludes with some implications for future research and further dialogue. We note that other outcomes and

challenges experienced are beyond the scope of this paper and special issue and are forthcoming in separate journal articles.

2. Pacific inclusion in research practices

Pacific inclusion in research practices is evident in the scope and design of the study, data collection, the interpretation of the findings, and the dissemination of the results (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). For example, there are a multitude of established ethnic-specific methodologies, methods, models, metaphors, and cultural modes of delivery that Pacific researchers can use, including non-Indigenous research approaches or a blend of various approaches (Tualaulelei & McFall-Lafferty, 2019). These approaches include Samoan *Fonofale* Model of Health (Pulotu-Endermann, 2001), *Teu le va* (Anae, 2016) and *Fa'afaletui* Research Framework (Goodyear-Smith & Ofanoa, 2021); Tongan *Talanoa* (Vaiotei, 2006) and *Kakala* Model (Thaman, 1992); Cook Islands *Tivaevae* (Maua-Hodges, 2000); and Fijian *Vanua* (Nabobo-Baba, 2008).

However, it is essential to exercise caution in order to avoid applying a single ethnic-specific method as 'pan-Pacific' or 'multicultural', implying that it is universally appropriate for all types of research. Nonetheless, such inclusive research practices signify and honour cultural and tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance (Smith, 2004). This will facilitate research in reaching marginalized populations (Rushing & Stephens, 2012) and invoke greater engagement and knowledge transfer. Consequently, these emerging and diverse research practices pave the way for prioritizing research aligned with decolonization efforts.

2.1 Pacific Leaders, Reverends, Matai, and Ariki

One of the methods we used to co-create inclusively was the involvement of Pacific leaders, such as reverends, *Matai* (i.e., Samoan Chief), *Ariki* (i.e., Cook Islands Chief) and other cultural leaders in the communities when recruiting participants for the focus groups and interviews.

Pacific leaders serve as invaluable reservoirs of knowledge regarding all things Pacific, such as networks, issues, and responses, and are well-positioned to identify clusters of Pacific individuals in the communities, churches, and social groups. As such, they represent pillars of knowledge, capable of bridging research outcomes with delivery methods that resonate with their respective communities (Franco, 1991). Additionally, engaging with Pacific churches and leaders is culturally appropriate and a respectful way of building rapport when developing relevant cultural tools, initiating programmes, and disseminating critical information (Fairbairn-Dunlop et al., 2014; Ministry of Health, 2021).

In the context of IB, this method can be likened to ‘elite interviewing’, which involves interviewing ‘elites’ (Welch et al., 2002). These individuals typically occupy a senior or middle management position, possess high status and responsibility, have extensive industry experience, maintains a vast network of professional and personal relationships, and international exposure (Welch et al., 2002).

Including Pacific leaders in our research enabled us to successfully extend our recruitment drive and participant reach, particularly during COVID-19 lockdowns when we had no option but to remain indoors, recruit entirely online, and rely on our Pacific networks for support (Ofe-Grant, 2022). Furthermore, the profound cultural concept of ‘*va*’ (i.e., relational spaces), deeply rooted in Samoan traditions, served as a bridge connecting with *Matai* as organized by several research assistants before meeting in the focus groups. This provided the opportunity to share cultural insights within the Samoan community. Likewise, *Ariki*, Niuean Pastors, and

Tuvaluan community leaders provided supplementary avenues for sharing insights, thereby contributing to a more profound understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage that enriched the data collection process.

2.2 Faith, Spirituality, and Prayers

Another area where we co-created Pacific inclusion in our research practices was incorporating religiosity and spirituality, which are integral components of Pacific cultural protocols (Efi, 2007). With more than 70 per cent of Pacific peoples attending church as Christians (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018; Pasefika Proud, 2016), it made sense to incorporate prayers (Ioane et al., 2021) led by Pacific reverends, priests, and pastors as part of our research methods, both at the beginning and conclusion of meetings, interviews, and focus group discussions. Integrating prayers and other spiritual practices contextualises the message that Pacific wellbeing is intricately linked with spirituality and, ultimately, God (Fairbairn-Dunlop et al., 2014). Consequently, Pacific research endeavours should leverage religious or spiritual methods to enable full and beneficial participation (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018).

Faith and spirituality are vital considerations within Pacific communities and are best understood as aligning behaviour with values founded in God and cultural traditions (Ravulo et al., 2019). Spirituality is deeply ingrained in the lives of many indigenous people (e.g., National Congress of American Indians, 2009; Wilson et al., 2022). Indeed, spirituality predates the advent of Christianity in Pacific cultures and remains a central value across the Pacific. For instance, daily rituals such as morning and evening prayers and readings from the Bible (Williams et al., 2021) are customary among Pacific communities. Furthermore, the concept of the 'va' (i.e., relational space) is considered spiritual, where relationships between

people, the living and the dead, unspoken expectations, and obligations are fulfilled, respected, and nurtured (Efi, 2007; Wendt, 1996).

However, religiosity and spirituality, as an academic and IB concept, tends to receive limited attention and acknowledgement within Western academic paradigms and approaches, despite being a normative institution in many international countries (Barnard & Mamabolo, 2022; Philips, 2014). Moreover, both are positioned as valuable tenets in the Pacific and other indigenous cultures, as a guiding force for Pacific peoples, prompting mindfulness in their behaviour, approach, and decision-making processes. Thereby ensuring that the ‘*va*’ (i.e., relational spaces) is healthy and harmonious between them and others (Efi, 2007).

2.3 Pacific research: nothing about us ... without us

Thus far, we have provided an overview of the significance of Pacific inclusion in research practices, demonstrated through using Pacific community leaders for participant recruitment and integrating faith, spirituality, and prayers into the research design. Regarding Pacific research, we recommend involving researchers of Pacific descent (Nabobo-Baba, 2004) who firmly commit to various Pacific cultural protocols and are passionate about Pacific issues. For example, our research team consisted of Pacific research assistants of New Zealand and Pacific-born statuses who live and work in various locations across New Zealand. Motivated by our ‘*alofa*’ (i.e., love), concern and dedication to Pacific communities, we demonstrated adept facilitation skills, confidence, and engagement in our research roles, serving as Pacific ambassadors and role models for the next generation. While some team members hold prominent positions within churches and community organizations, all of us possess the ability to navigate Pacific contexts and relationships built upon principles of respectful ‘*va*’ (i.e., relational spaces) and ‘*tautua*’ (i.e., honourable services). These prerequisites are

essential for facilitating engagement and establishing rapport with Pacific communities (Barnett, 2007; Ponton, 2018).

By implementing culturally appropriate and responsive research methods, we effectively enhanced the engagement and contribution of the Pacific participants (Ravulo et al., 2019). Consequently, Pacific peoples are more likely to feel at ease during interviews and discussions with fellow Pacific individuals (Ofe-Grant, 2022). Therefore, inclusive Pacific research practices should involve researchers of Pacific descent who are familiar with navigating Pacific protocol, customs, and values (Tagicakiverata & Nilan, 2018). Our collaborative team combined diverse perspectives, skills, and cultural insights, enhancing our approach to addressing inherent tensions in reflexive positionality research (Piekkari & Welch, 2006).

3. Challenges in administering inclusion in Pacific research practices

3.1 Justifying our Pacific research practices and methods over and over...

Conversely, this journey has its share of tensions and challenges. In reflexive positionality research, complexities often emerge, shaping the course of the research study (Piekkari & Welch, 2006). For example, very early in the research process, numerous inquiries arose regarding our choice of utilising Pacific methods and practices.

Notably, questions such as “*Do they [Pacific research methods] work and are they robust?*” and “*How will you do this [regarding ethical considerations]?*” were posed by senior White academic colleagues during a conference presentation, where the lead researcher was presenting preliminary findings to a large audience. Furthermore, a reviewer affiliated with a prestigious international journal enquired regarding a preliminary manuscript submitted by the lead researcher, which was subsequently rejected. The reviewer queried, “*What about*

using the 'normal' methods?' and provided four empirical studies of similar research using traditional Western-centric methods.

Although we were proud to administer and promote Pacific research methods, it was apparent that we felt compelled to justify our methodological choices to senior White colleagues, particularly noting their seniority within academia and the unequal intersectional power relations that segregate and privilege researchers (Ralfs, 2024). This power struggle is evidenced by the experiences of other junior and more specifically ethnic minority researchers, who often encounter marginalization in universities regarding 'knowledge creation', thus finding themselves excluded from discourses surrounding knowledge production (see Bumpus, 2020; Ralfs, 2024).

In another example, a national television network contacted the lead researcher to request an interview about the study. The network producers subsequently asked for a summary outlining the research topic and objectives, which was promptly provided. Following this, the network producers requested a "*simplified*" outline of the research methods, accompanied by evidence that these methods were successful and being used by other researchers. Here, we noted that the perceived 'credibility' of the research methods seemed to be an issue.

Additionally, the producers encouraged the lead researcher to consider using "*English words tailored for the general New Zealand audience*" during the interview. Otherwise, the network could not facilitate the interview due to the use of "*unusual foreign research terms*" by the lead researcher.

Recognising the likelihood that White researchers would not face similar and extensive inquiries regarding their research methods, we opted to decline the television interview and forego the opportunity to promote our research on a national platform. We construed this request as an indication of outright colonialism and discrimination, privileging "the positional superiority of Western knowledge" (Smith, 2012, p. 6) over others (Sheets, 2005) and

‘dumbing-down’ (Pacific Media Watch, 2015) the Pacific methods used in the study to appease the television producers. Colonial epistemes distort ideologies through power structures and control, perpetuating differences, and the development of an inferior status (Llucmetkwe et al., 2023). Evidently a long-entrenched power imbalance exists, as Foucault (1977) contends that knowledge formation and the “increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process” (p.224).

Furthermore, this colonialist approach perpetuated a deficit-oriented and victim-blaming perspective (Cram et al., 2013), portraying Pacific peoples as backward, unintelligent, and disorganized (Loto et al., 2006). This philosophy emphasizes their perceived need for assistance to ‘fix them’ (Martin et al., 2019, p.42) while disregarding or ‘silencing’ indigenous inherent strengths, knowledge, and resilience (Smith, 2012; Wilson et al., 2022).

Aside from feeling insulted, hurt, and marginalized within academia and experiencing that sense of being ‘silenced’ (Smith, 2012) and rendered ‘invisible’ (Valoyes-Chavez et al., 2023) by well-intentioned colleagues and the media, our approach of drawing on Pacific methods was not abandoning theory and academic scholarship (Wilson et al., 2022) or resorting to antiquated methods and knowledge. Instead, we advocated decolonizing prevailing colonial and Western-centric practices, replacing them with indigenous Pacific theory, research, and knowledge. Consequently, we affirmed Pacific perspectives and knowledge as valuable, legitimate, and valid (Wilson et al., 2022), serving as foundational elements from which Pacific scholars construct their investigations, findings, models, and theories (Love, 2019).

Upon reflection, it became evident that as Pacific researchers, we moved between ‘privilege’ and ‘marginality’ (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017) at the initial stages of this research project. Our privilege was manifested by our roles as Pacific researchers in the Pacific communities and where many Pacific peoples perceived us as ‘conduits’ connecting

them to authority and power structures. Furthermore, privilege was demonstrated through *tautua* (honourable services), that is, our actions and goals aimed at improving the outcomes of the Pacific peoples using their words, methods, and knowledge systems. This approach asserted a decolonizing position of ‘*nothing about us without us*’ and empowering Pacific peoples’ voices, agencies, and identities (Battiste, 2008; Enari et al., 2024).

Yet, at the same time, we encountered emotional labour and heartache from our experiences of marginalization and discrimination, which at times, silenced us (Smith, 2012; Spivak, 1988), stripped away our ‘voice’ (Morrison & Milliken, 2003) and denied our rights as indigenous Pacific researchers to disseminate our knowledge, and access platforms that would typically be available to all researchers.

Two years later, a Pacific-based television show learned about the research and interviewed the lead researcher. During the interview, the researcher discussed their experiences and outcomes of the research journey, elaborating on the Pacific methods used and the data collection results that provide successful outcomes regarding enhancing literacy and numeracy for the Pacific peoples (Ofe-Grant *et al.*, *forthcoming*).

4. Recommendations to IB researchers

Drawing on our experiences and the recommendations of other Pacific and IB researchers to decolonize power structures that maintain exclusion and inequities (e.g., Boussebaa, 2023; Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective et al., 2022; Ponton, 2018; Smith, 2004; Zagelmeyer, 2023), we propose some critical questions for IB researchers to consider prior to undertaking research involving indigenous communities and adopting inclusive research practices of decoloniality.

4.1 *Who are you and what is your connection to the research?*

Research concerning Pacific peoples and indigenous communities include positionality, where locating yourself and the collective within your identity are paramount (Underhill-Sem, 2020). In other words, ‘*knowing who you are (ethnicity) and where you come from (ancestry)*’. Other indigenous scholars advocate this path of reconciling our ‘intellectual’ and ‘spiritual’ selves *before* engaging in research with indigenous communities (Nabobo-Baba, 2004, Smith, 1999). This personal reconciliation is likened to a ‘cultural footprint’ that forms part of your identity and ownership of your ethnicity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Such a journey is imperative due to the potential differences in identities, frames of references, biases, and perspectives that exist between diverse populations. As such, positionality acknowledges the connections and relationships between oneself, the environment, and the communities of interest (Neumann & Neumann, 2015). Therefore, positioning yourself in relation to the research, particularly in IB contexts involving decolonization, is important (Reuber & Fischer, 2022).

4.2 *Should you be doing this research?*

Your journey of positionality may not necessarily lead to questions or inclusive practices of decoloniality. In which case, this would warrant critical self-reflection on the suitability (Skille, 2022) and the roles and responsibilities within the research design. For example, the decision-making process regarding who collects data on issues concerning Pacific peoples, followed by data analysis and interpretation of the results conducted by non-Pacific and White researchers, raises concerns of biased assumptions and results stemming from incompatible and White worldviews, values, and experiences. This aspect is particularly important in IB, where managing multicultural research teams and MNE introduces

additional challenges (Sinkovics et al., 2009). Furthermore, using non-Pacific analyses is disrespectful to the Pacific people's traditional knowledge and cultural protocol.

We recommend allocating the tasks of data collection and analyses exclusively to Pacific researchers given that they are the closest representatives of Pacific communities and worldviews. As suggested by Smith (2012) and Denzin et al. (2008), consulting with indigenous peoples and including indigenous researchers in the study serves as a pathway toward indigenous methods, leading to decolonizing research practices (Brannely & Boulton, 2017).

4.3 Why are you doing this research: Know your purpose!

As IB researchers, we have a responsibility to ensure that our research approach, design, and methods are culturally appropriate, respectful, and reflective of the lived experiences of the communities of interest (Smith, 1999; Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). As such, we recommend that IB researchers consider the purpose of the research and ascertain whether it is an important and relevant issue (Aguinis et al., 2023) that has impact (Tung, 2023) with policy and practical implications. Furthermore, the outcomes should genuinely contribute to the transformation, enrichment, and betterment of the lives of indigenous peoples (Love, 2019; Smith, 2004). Importantly, these outcomes should not exacerbate the marginalization of already marginalized populations (e.g., Mead, 1928) or perpetuate false stereotypes and generalizations (Loto et al., 2006). Instead, the outcomes should strive to offer practical and real-world solutions, such as systems development, policy creation or changes, promoting community collaborations and ethical and moral initiatives. Additionally, we need to remember that the purpose of our research should strive to promote ongoing discourses about decolonizing research practices (Smith, 2004), the harmful effects of privilege (Bumpus, 2020; Ralfs, 2024), and the impact of damaging colonial power structures that reinforce

inequities and inequalities (McAllister et al., 2020). Hence, research projects should aim to create inclusive spaces through shared narratives and implementing inclusive practices.

4.4 *How will the Pacific peoples and indigenous people benefit from the research study?*

The final question pertains to the value of reciprocity which is common among Pacific cultures and predating Christianity. From a Pacific perspective, reciprocity encapsulates spiritual and communal wellbeing that connects families, villages, and communities through acts of support, service, and the sharing or gifting of resources or cash for significant events such as funerals, weddings, and environmental crises such as the Samoa Tsunami (Efi, 2007, Ravulo et al., 2019; Rumbach & Foley, 2014). The expectation is that such acts will be reciprocated or returned, thus, establishing a symbiotic relationship where the health and wellbeing of each member is dependent on the other, and viewed as *tapu* (i.e., sacred) (Efi, 2007). This concept ensures the preservation of the *va* (i.e., relational spaces) (Ravolu et al., 2019; Southwick et al., 2012). This meaning extends beyond the English translation of reciprocity, which merely denotes “a situation or relationship in which two people or groups agree to do something similar for each other” (Britannica. 2024).

Reciprocity is demonstrated, for example, through symbolic gestures when in *talanoa* (speaking) (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Tagicakiverata & Nilan, 2018) provisions of donations such as food or shopping vouchers (Barnett, 2007; Ofe-Grant, 2022), promises to return to the participants and communities with updates and sharing their research results (Barnett, 2007; Ponton, 2018; Southwick et al., 2012), mentorship of others (Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective et al., 2022) and support for participants’ work-related projects, events, or study endeavours (Dash et al., 2017). Therefore, we recommend that IB researchers consider appropriate forms of reciprocity that is relevant and respectful to the community of interest.

5. Conclusion

Utilising methods that prioritize Pacific epistemologies and ontologies enables culturally relevant engagement for inclusion, data capture and analysis, and interpreting results that resonate with Pacific perspectives (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). This approach generates an authentic and relevant exchange of information necessary for informing and transforming policy and practice with greater societal impact (Roberts & Dörrenbächer, 2014; Wilson et al., 2022). Additionally, culturally inclusive Pacific methods can be regarded as reclamation, reinstating traditional ways of knowing and knowledge (Fairbairn-Dunlop et al., 2014) while simultaneously accommodating contemporary knowledge and realities (Roberts & Dörrenbächer, 2014). Therefore, we recognized the necessity of integrating Pacific research practices into our approach by involving Pacific communities and leaders, faith, spirituality and prayers, and an all-Pacific research team as integral components of the research design.

However, as highlighted in our paper, this research encountered complex tensions shaped by challenges in opting for Pacific methods over conventional Western-centric approaches and the necessity of defending this decision primarily to White and non-indigenous audiences.

This serves as a reminder to IB researchers that we are navigating pathways that continue to evolve and undergo transformation regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (Boussebaa, 2023). More specifically, decolonizing IB knowledge (Zagelmeyer, 2023) and addressing epistemic violence (Llucmetkwe et al., 2024) on a global scale. Additionally, this approach is especially significant considering that the IB community actively contributes to the study of MNE, which plays a central role in colonialism, the role of culture in non-Western contexts (Cairns, 2019; Reuber & Fischer, 2022), as well as addressing ‘grand challenges’ inherent in this global age, that being social inequality and inequities (Boussebaa, 2023; Buckley, 2002).

It is therefore imperative that IB pays more attention to non-Western contexts and the decolonization agenda (Cairns, 2019; Tung, 2023).

However, despite the decolonizing and inclusive emphasis throughout this paper, a potential dilemma persists for IB scholars, who may encounter institutional pressures to conform to utilizing the dominant paradigm rather than adopting indigenous or alternative research methods (Aguzzoli et al., 2024). Calls to decolonise the methods used in IB research adds to the discourse surrounding alternative paradigms and methodologies, highlighting their importance in scholarly innovation and understanding IB phenomena (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013).

Overall, this journey has been an enriching and culturally enlightening experience. We hope these insights can guide IB community and researchers working in Pacific and indigenous contexts, to effectively nurture and support participants and communities, fostering transformative research that continues to empower the Pacific peoples.

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