

## LIFE COURSE CENTRE WORKING PAPER SERIES

### *Pasifika* Diaspora Research Methodology: Review of Literature

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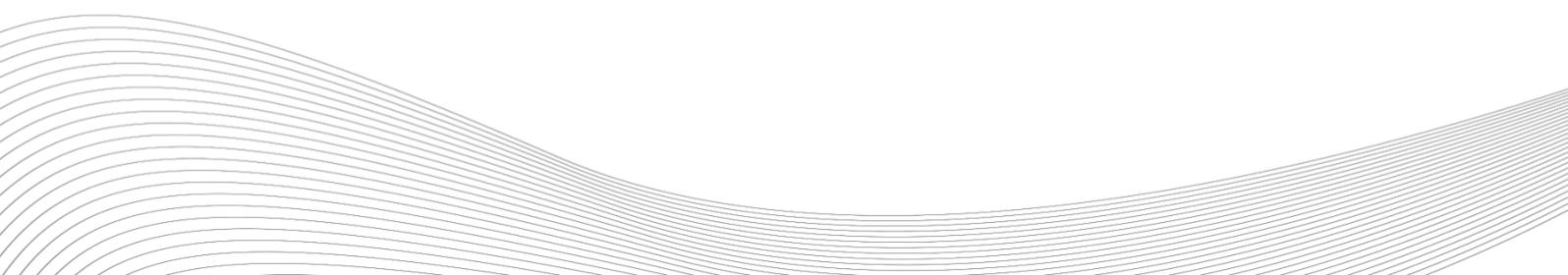
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## NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

My PhD study focuses on the well-being of Samoan and Tongan groups living in, and moving between, Auckland and Brisbane. This research seeks to capture the voices, perceptions and experiences of these migrants using a mixed methods approach (both qualitative and quantitative data) that incorporates indigenous research methods (Pacific Island frameworks based on cultural knowledge and protocols). This working paper presents a review of literature that is relevant to the focus of the PhD study, concentrating on the Pasifika diaspora in Auckland and Brisbane. This paper is the third of a three-part literature review: (1) Pasifika diaspora; (2) Pasifika well-being; and (3) Pasifika methodology.

The existing literature that considers Pasifika methods and methodology is extensive, providing approaches that are relevant to the Pasifika diaspora communities based in Australia and New Zealand. However, as highlighted by this review, there is often a misconstrued use of Pasifika methods and misconception of Pasifika methodology when applied without the cultural and social reasonings that go together with these research approaches. This paper contributes to a much-needed dialogue about the correct application of indigenous methodology, often overlooked by those researching indigenous peoples. This paper highlights important considerations, specific to the Samoan and Tongan diaspora groups in Australia and New Zealand. It introduces researchers to Pasifika methods and methodology and suggests guidelines for the use of these research approaches, in a culturally and socially responsive way.

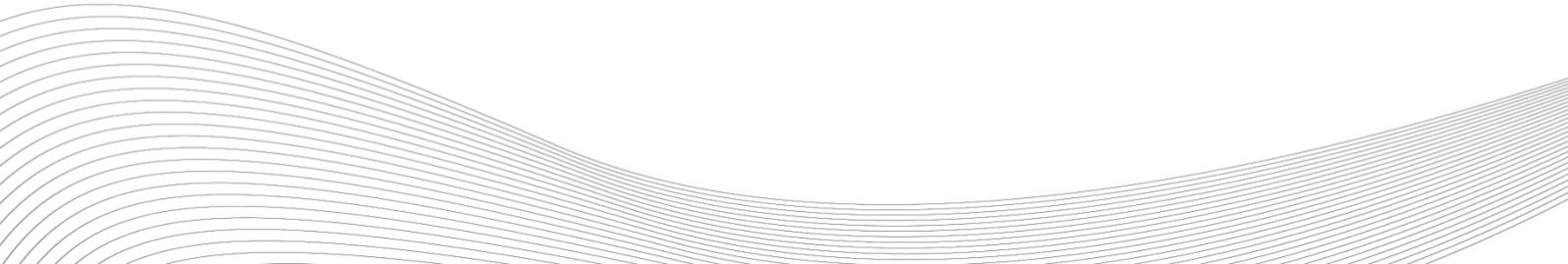


## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding *Pasifika* Trans-Tasman migrant perceptions and experiences of well-being in Auckland, New Zealand compared to their perceptions and experiences of well-being in Brisbane, Australia is important because there is limited information available on the underlying motives of *Pasifika* Trans-Tasman migrants moving from New Zealand to settle long-term in Australia, and the salient links that may exist between their migration and well-being. Therefore, this paper will consider the research methodologies and frameworks relevant to the *Pasifika* diaspora contexts of Auckland and Brisbane, with a focus on research frameworks and methods that are culturally responsive to the Samoan and Tongan groups that my research seeks to embrace.

**Keywords:** *Pasifika*; Samoa; Tonga; diaspora; *Talanoa*; *Vā*

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‘The process of understanding and developing a cultural concept is like roasting yams. It takes time, with much turning and counterturning...For example, when I converse with research participants...I listen to their thoughts and I also share with them my understanding and my critique...It is a reciprocal process of sharing and critiquing.’  
**Ka’ili (2017, p.62)**

## **Introduction**

*Pasifika* research methods and frameworks are important considerations when studying *Pasifika* peoples. The way in which people are recruited, interviewed, surveyed, observed and informed during research needs to align with acceptable protocols and social and cultural observances of the peoples being studied. Therefore, this paper aims to provide an overview of the research methodologies and frameworks relevant to the *Pasifika* diaspora contexts of Auckland and Brisbane, with a focus on research frameworks and methods that are culturally responsive to the Samoan and Tongan groups that my research seeks to embrace. The following discussion will consider the following aspects pertinent to the research focus on *Pasifika* diaspora residing in Auckland and Brisbane: (1) *anga faka-Tonga* (Tongan way of life) and *fa’a-Sāmoa* (Samoan way of life) -- cultural guidelines for researchers embedded in Tongan and Samoan culture (2) *Pasifika* worldviews, and (3) the *talanoa* and *vā* -- widely accepted *Pasifika* research methods.

### ***Anga Faka-Tonga and Fa’a-Sāmoa***

According to Ka’ili (2017), researching within *Pasifika* contexts is a communal concept and practice (pp. 48-65). This leads me to suggest that there are significant understandings of the cultural way of life, embraced by Tongan and Samoan communities in both their homelands and in diaspora communities abroad, and that researchers working with *Pasifika* Tongan and Samoan informants should be aware of these cultural ways of being. Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009), advocates that ‘harnessing an awareness of indigenous concepts is not enough, however, unless indigeneity and its concepts are fully integrated into theoretical approaches to mobility research in Oceania’ (p.20) In support of this notion, I would recommend that both *Pasifika* and non-*Pasifika* researchers working with *Pasifika* Tongan and Samoan informants pursue a more in-depth knowledge of cultural aspects that relate to their topic of study and adopt research approaches, design and strategies that will be culturally responsive. These will inevitably lead to more fruitful outcomes in the research. In the case of my own research, with the Tongan and Samoan communities based in Auckland and Brisbane, I will consider a narrative approach as well as participant-observation; these strategies naturally align with culturally acceptable ways

of research within *Pasifika* contexts where *anga faka-Tonga* and *fa'a-Sāmoa* are naturally expected of a *Pasifika* researcher.

*Anga faka-Tonga* is better known as the 'Tongan way of life.' According to Faleolo (2012), *anga faka-Tonga* is 'the combined output or living out of two concepts; Tongan ethnic identity and Tongan cultural identity' (p.8). These identities are both subjectively defined although always embracing all values, beliefs and practices that are deemed 'Tongan culture.' Ka'ili (2017), compares several lists of Tongan values fundamental to the Tongan cultural way of being; *tauhi vā* is evidently central to *anga faka-Tonga* (pp.30-31). It should be noted that although there is a strong acceptance across Tongan communities (both diaspora and homeland) of *anga faka-Tonga*, there is a continuum of views held about its application in different contexts whereby some traditional aspects of *anga faka-Tonga* can be seen as 'burdensome' and limiting of progressive lives within the diaspora contexts (Faleolo, 2012, p.9, p.53). According to Afeaki (2004), and Taufu (2010), *anga faka-Tonga* is a highly contested concept within the Tongan diaspora communities of Australia and New Zealand. There are differing views between the older and younger generations of migrants. Afeaki (2004), analysed the sociocultural connections that New Zealand-born Tongans maintained. She concluded that despite not speaking fluent *lea faka-Tonga* (Tongan language) Tongan youth remained connected to their culture and identity as 'being Tongan' through their parents, extended family and participation in cultural and community events. Although Taufu (2010), notes that inter-generational differences exist between the Western perspectives that younger cohorts have and the Tongan perspectives that older cohorts continue to embrace in Australia, both generations maintain their cultural identity is Tongan.

*Fa'a-Sāmoa*, the Samoan way of life, is an all-embracing set of cultural ways of knowing, thinking and living, that Samoan people embrace in their daily lives and decision-making processes. Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009), highlights the existing links between *fa'a-Sāmoa* and mobility, explaining that the significance of this knowledge set as 'symbolic capital' and 'nonmaterial investments' made by Samoan people migrating from Samoa further abroad (p.16). Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009), argues that this symbolic capital is often more important than economic capital (p.16) that allows them to live within a Western system of development and individual gross domestic product, that is purposefully fed back into a collective '*āiga*<sup>1</sup> well-being driven by their moral economy (p.17). Gershon (2012, pp. 56-57), and Ioane (2017),

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<sup>1</sup> The Samoan term '*āiga*' typically refers to the family, including the extended family (this is similar to the Tongan term *kāinga*), although the more formal terms used for the Samoan extended families are '*āiga potopoto* or '*āiga lautele*.

further explains this way of thinking, whereby *Pasifika* Samoan based in New Zealand pride themselves on their relationships to their family, village and community, as a ‘Samoan perspective’ or ‘Samoan worldview’ (p.38). According to Ioane (2017), a key component of the Samoan collective worldview is the concept of *vā*, ‘It is how Samoan people generally understand and define the social, spiritual, cultural, economic and religious system to which they belong’ (Mo’a, 2015 cited in Ioane, 2017, p.39).

### ***Pasifika* worldview**

Essentially, *Pasifika* see themselves as a part of a whole. They are not stand-alone-individuals, but rather an important member of a greater collective that usually form along lines of kinship and genealogy, as well as other social and cultural connections (Ka ‘ili, 2017, pp.52-55; Macpherson & Macpherson, 2009, pp.73-77) between Pacific homelands and diaspora, including spiritual connections (Makasiale, 2013, pp.277-278). The following poem by Tui Atua Tamasese Efi (2009, cited in Ioane, 2017, p.38), explains the Samoan worldview that also echoes similarities with the Tongan worldview, upheld by the late Queen Sālote’s account of Tongan virtues (cited in Ka‘ili, 2017, p.31) and further endorsed by Samoan and Tongan scholars alike:

“I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share my tofi (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my belonging.”

**Efi, 2009** (cited in Ioane, 2017, p.38)

Katavake-McGrath (2015), provides an overview of the worldviews driving New Zealand government policies during 1998-2013. His exploratory study discusses the importance of understanding key concepts in *Pasifika* culture when studying Pacific peoples in New Zealand. These *Pasifika* concepts are often founded on age-old values that have evolved through histories of migration and settlement and therefore are not ‘new’ to the diaspora dialogue that my research focus picks up on. From my interdisciplinary readings across both Australian and New Zealand-based *Pasifika*-related studies, the acknowledgement of *Pasifika* ways of being have increased significantly since the 1990s (examples are Cowling, 1990; Fusitu‘a, 1992; ‘Ilaiū, 1997; Kavapulu, 1991; Macpherson, 1999; Schoeffel-Meleisea, 1994; Small, 1995), with actual engagement with these *Pasifika* concepts in research practice more broadly happening across Australia and New Zealand since the 2000s (Afeaki, 2004; Airini, Anae, Mila-Schaaf, 2010; ‘Ilaiū, 2009; Latu, 2009; Manu‘atu & Kepa, 2006; Mara, 2006; Penn, 2010). Katavake-McGrath (2015), suggests that improvements can be made to government policies that influence

the well-being of *Pasifika* in New Zealand through Pacific values-based research (p.18-19). For instance, policy-making systems that are economically driven may overlook the value systems that *Pasifika* people survive and thrive by, as Lilomaiva-Doktor (2009), discusses as the *Pasifika* moral economy (pp.15-19). These discussions highlight the importance of understanding *Pasifika* ideas and beliefs that shape their collective existence across their homelands and diasporic communities. I would suggest that there is a need for further research that will capture a more in-depth understanding of *Pasifika* well-being and its salient links to their worldviews, values systems and beliefs.

When internalised *Pasifika* knowledge presents itself as dialogue and behaviours within social and cultural spaces it is important for researchers to hear and see with the *Pasifika* worldview in mind. For instance, *Pasifika* well-being can be better understood when seen from a point of solidarity; the collective aspect of a *Pasifika* worldview anchors *Pasifika* well-being behaviours. There are several examples of research that embraces a *Pasifika* worldview contributing to our understanding of the holistic perceptions held by Samoan and Tongan migrants (Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2009; Penn, 2010; Seiuli, 2013; Va'a, 2001). Taumoefolau (2013), captures valuable insights into social behaviours of Samoan and Tongan communities in New Zealand using *Pasifika* values. According to Taumoefolau (2013), Samoan and Tongan people living in diaspora contexts have shared cultural concepts and values that are holistic. Taumoefolau (2013), lists respect, solidarity and resilience as examples of cultural concepts that 'stand out in the worldviews of Pacific peoples like Samoans and Tongans...and their salience is reflected in their prominent use and representation in Samoan and Tongan social intercourse' (p.135).

*Pasifika* frameworks provide researchers with contexts to better understand *Pasifika* values like respect and resilience. Both *fa'a-Sāmoa* and *anga faka-Tonga* are frameworks that are based on a shared understanding that relationships are at the core of their way of life (Faleolo, 2012, p8; Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2009, pp.7-8; Taumoefolau, 2013, pp.140-14). Relationships with God (spirituality) and with others (communality) are considered important aspects of life. Makasiale (2013), advocates that 'spirituality...is a dynamic, guiding light in all aspects of life for the Pacific person' (p.277). Ihara and Vakalahi (2011), highlight spirituality as the essence of wellness among Samoan and Tongan elders in *Pasifika* diaspora based in Hawai'i, with a focus on the methods of connecting spiritually with God and with others through support networks in the church (pp.411-412). Ihara and Vakalahi (2011), suggest an interdependence of culture, spirituality and well-being (p.412) as well as the interwoven links between biological, physiological and social dimensions of a *Pasifika* elders' lives (pp.412-

414). These findings are significant to the thesis because of the holistic, collective and interdependence of important spheres within a person's well-being.

### ***Talanoa and Vā***

*Pasifika* frameworks are largely focused on relationship-building and maintaining good social relationships. Therefore, researching within *Pasifika* contexts requires the full engagement of the researcher during interviews and observations; seeking to understand both verbal and non-verbal language used within *Pasifika* contexts. Anae (2016) explains the significance of undertaking research within *Pasifika* contexts that is guided by 'reciprocal' respect (p.117).

*Talanoa* is a preferred methodology within *Pasifika* research contexts because it nurtures social spaces by embracing cultural protocol. Although *talanoa* is simply defined as a free-flowing conversation that involves the sharing of stories, thoughts and feelings (Faavae, 2016; Vaiioleti, 2006) this way of collecting *Pasifika* knowledge should be undertaken with a deeper understanding of the social spaces that *talanoa* occurs within and how it is best done. For instance, when speaking with a family leader, a church leader or community leader, there are expected and respectful ways that a *Pasifika* researcher should be dressed to address this person, provide information and conduct the interview in a culturally appropriate way. Ka'ili (2017), explains the significance of *vā* -- *Pasifika* social spaces or social relations -- is in the act of maintaining these and the resulting beauty achieved in this act; *tauhi vā* (Tongan) or *teu le vā* (Samoan) means to nurture social relations (pp.30-33; Anae, 2016, p.120-121). Therefore, on entering *talanoa* with *Pasifika*, the object should be to maintain social spaces and relationships. Halapua (2003), makes an important link between *vā* and *talanoa* by explaining that *talanoa* allows for meaningful communication built on shared obligations. In other words, participation in *talanoa* obligates researchers to not only gather information but also to provide information. The process of *talanoa* is two-way; giving and receiving knowledge. Therefore, information reciprocity in *talanoa* is essential to maintaining *Pasifika* social spaces. *Tauhi vā* or *teu le vā* is also an important facet of participant observation. Researchers working and living within *Pasifika* contexts must bear in mind that there are codes of speaking, dressing and behaving that build into the maintenance of relational spaces. According to Ponton (2018), 'this Pacific methodology takes into consideration the values and beliefs required by all stakeholders' (p.3).

Consequently, for the purpose of capturing *Pasifika* voices on their own experiences and perceptions of well-being within the contexts of Auckland and Brisbane, it is important for

the research I am undertaking to collect the dialogue of the *Pasifika* Trans-Tasman migrants in a culturally responsive way (Brown 2012, Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008). Amongst other highly accredited *Pasifika* academics, Kai‘ili (2017), promotes the use of *talanoa* when dealing with *Pasifika* diaspora communities. This is a significant proposal that also suggests there is a continued cultural approach that spans the social spaces in both homeland Pacific Islands and *Pasifika* diaspora contexts. According to Vaioleti (2003), the ‘two-way’ interviewing process of *talanoa* is a culturally responsive way of interviewing in *Pasifika* contexts, and further defines *talanoa* as a ‘conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal...and interacting without a rigid framework’ (p.16). According to Havea (2010), *talanoa* ‘opens sacred texts and traditional values...is inviting and permissive, not just to the learned readers but also to all participants who engage one another’ (p.14). Latu (2009), suggests that the only way we can ‘dig deep’ into the ‘warehouses’ and ‘libraries’ of understanding that is within the hearts and minds of *Pasifika* people is through *talanoa* (pp.3-4). Thus, *talanoa* is an approach that creates a *vā* or relationship between the informant and researcher whereby free-flowing dialogue occurs; this approach is well-suited to the focus of my research work with *Pasifika* diaspora. *Talanoa* has been widely accepted as an approach of gathering in-depth qualitative data across a range of disciplines within several Melanesian and Polynesian academic circles (Fa‘avae, Jones & Manu‘atu, 2016; Halapua, 2007; Latu, 2009; Otsuka, 2006; Prescott, 2008; Vaioleti, 2003 & 2006; Vaka‘uta, 2009). Similar to a western-derived semi-structured interview, the downside of using the traditional method of face-to-face *talanoa* is the actual hours required to have an ongoing and free-flowing dialogue with each informant and the need to schedule meeting times that suit the informant and researcher availability.

Tunufa‘i (2016), outlines a growing concern amongst *Pasifika* academics, that relates to the misapplication of the *talanoa* research method (pp.228, 233-234). Furthermore, Tunufa‘i (2016), calls for more thorough academic thought and discussion given to the etymology and meanings of indigenous methodologies utilised in *Pasifika* research (pp.229-232). I agree with this stance as it will only strengthen the validity and reliability of *Pasifika* research processes and outputs. However, when dismantling complex research constructs and concepts one needs to remember that these have developed layers of both strengths and weakness, over the years of conception, development, application and re-defining. I would recommend that any method or methodological approach be used in the research field with intermittent moments of pause and reflection. The reflective practice of *Pasifika* and non-*Pasifika* researchers alike, will ensure that the true essence of *talanoa*, as was originally intended by Halapua (2003; 2007), and

Vaiotele (2003; 2006), will continue. The realignment of researcher agendas in their use of *talanoa* will ensure that safe relational spaces for knowledge sharing are nurtured by respectful relationships and meaningful dialogue. When the *talanoa* approach is used purely as a method of gaining access to knowledge-rich spaces, the narrow motives of the researcher will be all too evident to most *Pasifika* informants (although they may be too polite to let the researcher know this directly) and the information-gathering exercise will not be as effective in nurturing a two-way free-flow dialogue. In some cases, informants may choose not to give their honest opinions, as a result of this built-in mistrust and disrespect shown by researchers who do not comply with the ‘unwritten rules’ of *Pasifika* sociocultural protocols, based on reciprocity. Thus, Tunufa‘i (2016), makes a valid comment about the misconstrued uses of *talanoa* and the misconceptions of *talanoa* as a methodology. This latter point will be addressed in my research. However, the significance of the *talanoa* approach is that it can help to create spaces of empowerment for both the researcher and the informants if done well (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014, pp.327-328). Tunufa‘i (2016) claims that although *talanoa* remains a useful approach in *Pasifika* research, it is lacking in philosophical rationale; ‘*Talanoa* is best regarded and used within research as a research tool or method rather than as a research methodology’ (pp.227, 238). I suggest that any research tool is effective and powerful in the right hands. Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba, (2014), promote ‘emotions and empathy’ as the essential elements in *talanoa* (pp.320-321) and ‘a way forward’ (p.323). Is this a possible solution to the milieu described by Tunufa‘i (2016)? I would argue that if a researcher has a deep understanding of the core *Pasifika* cultural values of reciprocal respect -- *faka‘apa‘apa*<sup>2</sup> or *fa‘aaloalo*<sup>3</sup> -- and the skills to implement these values in ways that are both appropriate to the given cultural contexts and meaningful to the people involved, then *talanoa* can be useful as a method of building ‘beautiful social spaces,’ (Ka‘ili, 2017, pp.26-29, 33) as well as expanding the researcher’s and informants’ philosophical knowledge spaces through ongoing dialogue. Again, my research seeks to clarify and develop *talanoa* as a research tool and as an overarching approach based on sociocultural beliefs and principles.

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<sup>2</sup> *Faka‘apa‘apa* is a Tongan value of respect that takes on its meaning within the given social space or context that the attitude, language and behaviour of *faka‘apa‘apa* is shown.

<sup>3</sup> *Fa‘aaloalo* is a Samoan word for respect. The meaning of this word is embodied in the display of a respectful attitude towards people’s roles within social spaces, in the language of respect used with people of differing ranks in social spaces, and the act of culturally appropriate behaviour within a given social space or context.

## **Conclusion**

This discussion has provided an overview of relevant methods and approaches that can be used within *Pasifika* research contexts. An important note for researchers to take away from this review of literature is that the use of these *Pasifika* methods and approaches does not automatically endorse a study as culturally responsive. The researcher must ensure there is modus operandi that is culturally and socially respectful, driven by a reciprocity that nurtures sociocultural spaces between researchers and informants.

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