

# A Nui Wave encountering Psychology from the shores of the Pacific

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*The world-view of Pacific nations which lie within the vast ocean of the South Pacific is yet to be uncovered in the world of psychology. Since the first wave of migrants to the shores of Aotearoa, /New Zealand, many differing pathways have evolved for the children of the Pacific sojourners. Pasefika youth are emerging as an influential force in youth culture today. However, these highly visible pockets of Pasefika talent mask the reality of overcrowded housing, poor health, low-incomes, tail-end educational achievement, and the frequent experience of issues to do with cultural identity and values (Tiatia, 1988; Taule'alea'usumai, 1997). Within these areas of concern Pasefika people will encounter 'helping professions' such as psychology. It is a discipline which has historically been devoted to understanding the human 'psyche' or 'soul'. Most of this body of knowledge however is derived from European contexts. The South Pacific has now produced a generation of Pasefika academics that are criss-crossing the globe with pioneering theoretical frameworks specific to our region. It is within this framework that I present to you my current thinking and its intent of 'claiming our legitimate space'.*

*"World views are best understood as we see them incarnated, fleshed out in actual ways of life. They are not systems or thought, like theologies or philosophies. Rather, world views are perceptual frameworks. They are ways of seeing. If we want to understand what people see, or how well people see, we need to watch how they walk" (Walsh and Middleton, 1984, p17).*

The world-view of Pacific nations that lie within the vast ocean of the South Pacific is yet to be uncovered in the world of psychology.

*32 years ago a man from the villages of Manunu (Upolu) and Fagamalo (Savai'i) and a woman from the inner-city village of Matautu tai-Apia (Upolu) gave birth to their middle child and only daughter, Siautu Tiomai Alefaio. The man left a prominent position in the police department's CIB in Samoa to become a factory worker in Hellaby Meats of Mt Wellington, New Zealand. The woman, a beautiful dancer in Aggie Grey's dance troupe and also an upcoming photographer at the age of 12, left all her aspirations of education to attain a job in order to make enough money for the prospective dream of 'making it big' in the 'land free-flowing with milk and honey'—Aotearoa New Zealand. For*

*some years Aotearoa was exactly that, with money enough to bring over all their other siblings and eventually their mothers.*

*My father (now a Parish minister of a Presbyterian church) and mother (an Early-Childhood educator) both self-sacrificially gave up their own hopes and dreams to pursue a bigger one—of prosperity for future generations. As a registered psychologist I have seen many journey stories similar to mine, and it is my own hope and dream that our contribution as people from the Pacific region will inevitably pave the way for future generations to embrace all that they are and become all that they have been called to be.*

Growing up in South Auckland, the heart of Polynesia in Aotearoa New Zealand, was never an easy feat. The descriptive journey stories of experiences living in two worlds, the Pacific world and the *palagi* (European) world, became more significant to me as a young adult finding my way through life in a tertiary institution. These stories prompted me to undertake a thesis investigating young people's perceptions of their identity in the context of their families and communities and the process of adjustment that occurs when differences

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between the values and beliefs of the host culture are encountered. The experience of walking in different cultural worlds has been investigated in many countries, mostly where the host culture is the dominant western culture, governed by eurocentric ideals and cultural norms (Anae, 1997; Crosbie, 1993; Rodriguez, 2003). Certain issues and challenges are commonly experienced by ethnic minority groups in transition within mainstream cultural environments. Tupuola explores these prevailing issues for Samoan youth through positing a positional difference through her paper Pasifika Edgewalkers (Tupuola, 2004).

### **Le Malaga - The Pacific journey**

Pacific peoples comprise approximately seven percent of the total Aotearoa/New Zealand population. It is a fast-growing, ethnically diverse and relatively youthful population (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). The wave of migration from the Pacific, which occurred during the 1950s to 1970s in response to the demand for labour in New Zealand, created the largest Pacific ethnic minority group in Aotearoa, New Zealand, next to the indigenous Maori, or *tangata whenua* (people of the land). The term Pacific is itself a homogeneous term used to describe a group of island nations from the region of the Pacific, including Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau, and Fiji. Meleisea and Schoffel (1998) have described the New Zealand-Pacific relationship through the migratory period as “a kind of extension of the country’s colonial relationship with the Pacific” (p. 166).

The majority of the Pasefika population in New Zealand is located in the urban Auckland region, which is projected to have the largest increase of Pacific people residing within its boundaries (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). Auckland city is often known as the ‘Polynesian capital of the world’. Associated with this ‘Pasefika-browning phenomenon’ is an increasing contribution of Pacific cultures over the past six decades to Aotearoa New Zealand as a nation. The significant impact of these can be experienced in many arenas, including the rugby field, where the sporting prowess of taro-fed Pacific-Blacks such as Jonah Lomu and Michael Jones has been celebrated, in the African-

American/Pasefika-Hip-Hop inspired music and arts scene, in live theatre and in the visual arts. Pasefika youth are emerging as an influential force in youth culture in New Zealand today. However, these highly visible pockets of Pasefika talent mask the reality of overcrowded housing, poor health, low-incomes, tail-end educational achievement, and the frequent experience of issues to do with cultural identity and values (Tiatia, 1988; Taule’alea’usumai, 1997).

Since the first wave of migrants to the shores of Aotearoa/New Zealand, many differing pathways have evolved for the children of the Pacific sojourners. The hopes and dreams for a better future have most always been sought in the realm of education (Aitken, 1996; Anae, 1997; Burgess, 1988; Dunlop, 1987; Hunkin, 1988; Anae et al, 2002). Despite the current prevailing issues of underachievement that haunt our current ‘globally-prized and recognized’ education system, the education encounter did pay-off for some. The encounter with academic institutions in the array of Universities across the Pacific has now produced a generation of Pacific academics that are criss-crossing the globe with pioneering theoretical frameworks specific to our region of the Pacific. It is within this framework that I present to you my current thinking and its intent.

The journey of Pasefika is born out of an historical migratory past filled with hopes and dreams of a new utopia – a new way of living, a better life with a hope-filled, expectant future. Today however, we encounter, on a daily basis, issues such as abuse, teenage pregnancy, suicide, drug and alcohol use, violence and crime. Pacific peoples are disproportionately represented in these areas of concern. Within these areas of concern the vast majority of Pasefika people will encounter ‘helping professions’ such as psychology. It is a discipline which has historically been devoted to understanding the human ‘psyche’ or ‘soul’. Most of this body of knowledge however is derived from European contexts. It has been my experience and observation that the encounter with psychological methods, practices and philosophies struggle to make sense in ‘our everyday’.

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The world-view of Pacific nations which lie within the vast ocean of the South Pacific is yet to be uncovered in the world of psychology. It is vital that their unique perspectives are sought and their voices heard. The unearthing of this raw material will contribute and enrich our understanding of diversity and help to unite our region with an identity uniquely our own.

*Our story is different.... our story is about family, about church and that's why it's gonna change.... (cited in Alefaio, 1999, p. 51)*

### Home is where the heart is

In the words of our newly appointed Head of State in Samoa, Iana Afioga Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese who even before his appointment has been a voice of providence calls us to remember that we are not I's but rather we.

*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 tofi with my aiga (family), my village, and my nation.  
I belong to my family and my family belongs to me.  
I belong to a village and my village belongs to me.  
I belong to a nation and my nation belongs to me.  
This is the essence of my sense of belonging."*

*Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese  
Tamasese Efi, Tui Atua Tupua (2002)*

Taking the essence of who we are, the journey to further lands was embarked. The journeys across Te-Moana-nui-a-Kiwa have produced the connections of our extended Polynesian aiga/kainga/whanau/family. Yet in reaching the shores of the new promises and hope - the process of working the land has taken its toll. Our encounters with 'the West' have seen our

extensive and rich connections misunderstood and to some extent abused.

Tongan writer Epeli Hauofa reminds us of our responsibility to 'claim our legitimate space'

*We are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us physically and psychologically in tiny spaces which we have resisted and from which we recently liberated ourselves (Hau'ofa cited Thaman 2002, p8)."*

Where do we begin? Our journey starts by 'going home'. For me this is Samoa – and so it is here that I choose to start. An investigative study undertaken in 2000 whilst in Samoa revealed some insightful discrepancies between 'ways of learning and being' in Samoa compared with New Zealand. Three major components were identified in relation to 'learning and being' based on the Fa'aSamoa (Samoan way). These were; "o le va'ai" (to see/watch/observe – visual), "o le fa'alogo" (receive instruction/compliance - listen), "o le tautala" (to speak/spoken word – oratory). A local Samoan village teacher highlights this difference well.

*Ou te talitonu o le a'oa'oga o tatou Samoa e tele i le va'ai, fa'alogo ma le tautala. O le fa'alogo o le mea fa'aaloalo lea o Samoa – e fa'asino ai le tamaititi e iloa fa'aaloalo". Believes 'learning' is very much seeing, hearing and language. This way of 'being' is a sign of respect in the Fa'aSamoa (Samoan way) – it is a sign of children who show respect.*

In life's application of this gem I began to "RECOGNIZE" (va'ai) that our learning, our way of being is steeped in Fa'aSamoa (the Samoan way). See Figure 1.

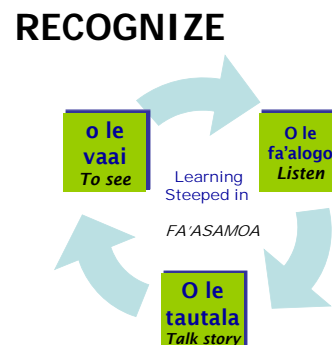


Figure 1. 'Recognise' Figure

Being home, being with the 'people of the land – my people' is where the seed was sown. It was here that the eyes of my heart were opened to 'va'ai' 'see', the heart of life steeped in family, in relational context, va fealoa'i – mutual respect and reciprocity and above all 'alofa' love. Our own heart's narratives intertwined with the biblical narratives introduced by the missionaries formed our encounter with a divine God, His 'son of man' Jesus who walked with 'the outcasts – people of the land'. This encounter is the core of Samoa's existing foundation: "E fa'avae Samoa i le Atua." From the village we migrate to the village church in the countries we choose 'to go'.

The humility of the embrace, awakened the ears of my heart to 'fa'alogo' 'hear' a new sound, the sound of 'the land', 'the seas', 'the orators', 'the divine nature calling' to begin again to 'tautala' 'talk story'. For me it was the sound of the waves, and as I listened my heart sobbed with tears for the 'safe passage'...

*(voice of child is played – songs of Samoa sung as well as conversational narrative – exciting purity is heard through the child's voice. We move then to the song "We don't need your education, we don't want no passerbys, we are the leaders of this nation, whatever happened to In God we Trust." – lyrics to City High Anthem).*

What is happening to the innocence of the voices of our children when they encounter education – the familial narratives are lost, the excitable innocence is gone, replaced by frustration, grief and loss and an overwhelming feeling of 'being let down'. Somewhere in the journey encounter with education the hearts of our children have been lost.

In line with the familial connections, Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave and Bush (2005) lead us out with the introduction to 'Fa'afaletui' – they launch our sea journey. The methodology of weaving together

knowledge from within the houses of relational arrangements was brought to them through Elder Men and Women's focus group participants, to explain the process in which they viewed themselves to be a part of. Essentially, *fa'afaletui* languages a method which facilitates the "gathering and critical validation of Samoan knowledge" (Tamasese et al, 2005, p302)

The uncovering of identity for our generation today and those to come, is to heed the 'voices' of our ancestors – 'the ties to the land' in which we come from cannot be underestimated. It is our safe passage forward.

Fa'afaletui (Tamasese et al, 2005) reiterates, emphasizes and reminds us we are 'whole' beings. That unlike the modern day 'science of psychology' where the mind/body split continues to prevail, they take us to the 'raw' nature of being – 'our spirit' 'agaga' 'ruah'. Perhaps I can be as bold as to say 'our modern day science of the heart' is our 'validity'.

The philosophical underpinnings of psychology need to be explored from a current Pacific worldview. 'Galuola' describes the wave break in Samoa that they wait for when coming into the outer island (Apolima). This wave is the one that takes us into safe-landing. The encounter with psychology is a journey of changing winds, and shifting tides but as we keep navigating and keep going the right wave will come and take us to safe landing. This Galu (wave) will bring 'ola' (life) to us and finally 'meaning' to our 'everyday'.

The wave is still forming, we trust in the divine revelations of our forefathers, ancestors to guide and lead us, in so doing we re-position our mission and co-create a new way forward in the area of psychology.

There were ancient prophets that heeded divine revelation to warn people of the importance of the 'heart', the importance of the 'spirit', the importance of greater things outside ourselves.

*Ia outou tutu i ala, ma vaavaai ma fesili i ala o le vavau, po o i fea le ala lelei, ma ia outou*

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*savavali ai, ona maua lea e outou o le malologa mo outou agaga” Jeremiah 6:16*

Stand at the crossroads and look...ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” *Jeremiah 6:16*

meaning the preparations for a sea trip are completed. The travelers sit and wait for wind. Suddenly a gentle breeze is felt on the bare skin and by the direction it comes from the people will know that the weather will be favourable. May we have the joy of this expectation for our encounter with psychology.

Our ancestral proverb says ‘Ua tofo i tino matagi lelei’ “A favourable wind is felt on the body”

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