

Talanoa vā: indigenous masculinities and the intersections of indigeneity, race, and gender within higher education

David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae* and Arcia Tecun^b and Sione Siu'ulua^c

^aEducation Division, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand; ^bAnthropology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand; ^cEthnomusicology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

dfaavae@waikato.ac.nz*; d.hernandez@auckland.ac.nz^b; ssiu623@aucklanduni.ac.nz^c

- David Fa'avae is a lecturer in the Education Division at the University of Waikato. Daniel Hernandez publishes under his maternal and paternal grandmothers' names of Arcia Tecun. He is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Auckland. Sione (Ata) Siu'ulua is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Ethnomusicology at the University of Auckland.

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Indigenous scholars constantly contend with deficit tendencies associated with the value and place of their cultural knowledge and practices within higher education. When gender is imbued through a racialized view of indigeneity or the indigenous scholar, the proposition of “other” and “othering” becomes a struggle of power relations which necessarily shapes the critical encounters in higher education spaces. This paper utilizes ‘talanoa vā’, a Pacific indigenous critical relational framework for understanding how academics comprehend indigenous masculinities through negotiating the intersections of indigeneity, race, and gender. Captured through talanoa and testimonio, we story our lived experiences as Pacific and indigenous scholars within New Zealand universities. We argue that, although “indigenous or indigeneity” discourses have inspired and empowered minority scholars, utilizing Pacific concepts enables a closer interrogation and negotiation of indigenous masculinities centred on spirituality and good relations, which is often overlooked when considering race, gender, colourism, and power within university settings.

Keywords: talanoa vā, indigenous masculinities, indigeneity, race, gender

Introduction

In our indigenous perspectives we are intricately connected with the universe. In other words, we are connected holistically with our worlds, materially and spiritually, whole and holy (Mika, 2017). As claimed by Māori and Indigenous philosopher, Carl Mika, all things are united through place and power. We, therefore, must be “attuned to power and place as the means of guidance to deal with things” (2017, p. 35). Place informs discussions about “Being as a holistic possibility” (2017, p. 35) and the energy of power and place deeply influences our being and becoming. For generations Indigenous peoples have lived and operated with an intimate understanding of who we are – our being and becoming – within our places and spaces (Ka’ili, 2017). Throughout this paper, unless otherwise stated, the non-English words are Tongan terms and concepts that are interpreted in brackets.

Relational positionality – our connections to Indigenous–indigenous

Relational positionality is an appropriate term for understanding how Indigenous–indigenous peoples are connected to each other, and to non–indigenous ideas and spaces. Indigenous–indigenous and Indigeneity–indigeneity, expressed through the capital “I” and small “i” highlights the intimate yet intricate connections between people, places, and ideas. We use both the “I” and “i” interchangeably, yet intentionally to express our positionality as indigenous peoples globally yet in relation to local Indigenous people. Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand are the tangata whenua or local Indigenous people of the land, our current residence and locale. Our positionality as indigenous rather than Indigenous is grounded in our desire to disrupt, de-

construct, and de-colonize thinking, systems, and practices that oppress and marginalize Pacific and minority academics within higher education without undermining our Indigenous relatives.

Despite our diverse ancestral origins, we, the authors have come into relation in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa, in the lands of Ngāti Whatua. However, our ancestral lineages are rooted in Tonga and Iximulew (Guatemala), while our lived experiences and places of residence have also included Utah (US), Tonga, and Niue. For instance, Fa’avae was born and raised in the Moana (Oceania), while Tecun, and Siu’ulua were born and raised on the continent of Turtle Island. We each identify as indigenous scholars, which we generally define as having a living connection to our ancestral ways of knowing, doing, and being. In the New Zealand context, our indigeneity in relation to Māori is better understood through the tuākana–teina or ta’okete–tehina (older–younger sibling or cousin) relationship which connects us as kin. When considering our relation to Māori and other indigenous peoples across Oceania, we are connected. Although we do not reside in our ancestral homelands, we maintain relations with our ancestors, peoples, and spaces, while making new relations where we stand. Moreover, we are of dark brown skin and identify as men who are cisgendered–heterosexual–perisexual. Our marginal positions within higher education as men of darker colour initiated our first point of similarity and relationality.

Indigenous masculinities – patterns of social relations and practices

Gender is generally associated with being masculine or feminine. The notion of sex roles was regularly used in the past to define gender which was too simplistic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinities as well as femininities provides a deeper understanding by focussing on the patterns of social practices and relations that construct fluid representations of gender in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, the ideas of masculinities and femininities can appear monocultural and eurocentric, often unrepresentative of indigenous peoples’ lived realities. Māori and Indigenous scholar, Brendan Hokowhitu (2012) proposed indigenous masculinities as having no “permanence but are subject to a morphing milieu” (p. 27). This means, if being indigenous is authenticated through specific behaviours or behavioural performances then it becomes an extremely repressive view of being indigenous. Ty Tengan (2002), a Kanaka ’Oiwī (Native Hawaiian) academic based in the US urges for “tactics of producing decolonized masculinities [for Kanaka Maoli] through the restructuring of gender practices using the indigenous philosophy of pono in gender relations to achieve balance, well-being, and righteousness” (p. 251).

Tengan advocates that when pushing for self-determination to challenge prevailing powers in higher education, we do not undermine our indigenous sisters. To do so would dishonour and disempower us both, representing a “double-colonization [of] indigenous women” (Tengan, 2002, p. 251). Perpetuating a double-colonization on indigenous women would further complicate and reduce the number of Pacific academics in higher education (Naepi, 2019). Tengan (2002) further inspires us to interrogate newer practices that “enable us to reclaim mana...that will help better negotiate the larger frameworks of gendered, raced, and classed power dynamics which both structure and are structured by our actions as men and women.” (p. 251).

Although there is limited scholarship to highlight the diverse and changing masculinities in Oceania (Jolly, 2008), we highlight our decolonial attempts to disrupt the colonial interpretations of indigenous masculinities by utilising our Indigenous-indigenous concepts and practices, as contextualised through our social relations and mobilities in the diaspora. Decolonization of indigenous masculinities is a disruption, deconstruction, and reconfiguration of how we see ourselves and our fatongia (responsibilities) within higher education. Within universities in Aotearoa, we come into relation with each other and institutional systems simultaneously. As early career indigenous scholars, how we engage and operate within higher education is based on honouring and strengthening our relations with Māori; our indigenous sisters, our gender fluid and diverse relations, and our indigenous Pacific languages, ideas, concepts, and practices.

Intersections of race, gender, and colourism – power and privilege in higher education

To better comprehend indigenous masculinities in this paper, we unpack race, gender, and colourism. We explore how people negotiate and create meaning within temporal and spatial contexts, particularly in-between the intersections, the ‘vā’ (Māhina, 2010; Ka’ili, 2017). The vā in-between indigeneity, race, gender and colourism must interrogate power, privilege, and oppression between non-indigenous as well as indigenous and darker skin folk within higher education. Indigenous blackfella scholar Chelsea Bond posted on twitter (September 12, 2017) that, “The solution 2 racism is NOT cultural awareness. The solution is a critical race consciousness which has nothing to do with my culture.” Elena Curtis who wrote an article on E-Tangata (8 March 2020), shared why Indigenous culture was not the answer to resolving the health disparities in Aotearoa. She shares:

We need to get our heads around how racism and privilege operate in society, and how they operate within our health care [and educational] institutions...Cultural safety —

rather than cultural competence — provides a mechanism to begin the important work of critical consciousness where healthcare professionals and their organisations examine themselves as being part of the problem.

Curtis (2020) addresses power and removes the responsibility from us to ‘save’ the system or each other, instead pointing to the systems of power that evade accountability while our physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual labour is increasingly exploited. It is with that in mind that we cannot get to Indigenous–indigenous cultural knowledge or cultural paradigm of knowledge in higher education without addressing the superficial markers that divide our labour and knowledge on the basis of race, colour, class, gender, physical or mental ability, and more. We call to question whether the institution can actually become invested in Indigeneity–indigeneity, experiencing antagonism to our existence, knowledge, and presence; tolerating ‘us’ if we comply, behave well, and remain comfortably complicit to power. A colour-coded system of power that overtly ignores colour, while covertly ignoring colonialism (Calderon, 2016; Mills, 2007). Yet, our physical presence provides an opportunity with each other and willing accomplices despite the barriers, bureaucracy, and neoliberalization of the university. It was our racial difference as dark skinned men in a space where everything is ‘white’ that connected us before coming into indigenous relation.

We found commonality with each other not only as men of darker colour who identify as indigenous, but also because we operate with a similar relational ethics. As the Black proverb affirms, ‘skin folk ain’t always kin folk’, we have learned that a visible colouring of the higher education space will not be enough. While we applaud efforts to continue to diversify our faculties and staff, it is not yet close to being anything meaningful with the possible exception of some diverse department outliers in segregated disciplines (e.g. Indigenous studies, ethnic studies, etc.). What is apparent is that Indigenous ontology cannot always be assumed to be inherent in a racially or a nationally visible Indigenous–indigenous person. For example, colour got us paying attention to each other, but behaviour connected us. So, when we as authors gather together, we socially function similarly, which is to say we privilege our relationships when we engage, regardless of whether we agree or not. We shout each other (treat each other) for meals, food, or drink, and are constantly aware of material limitations and barriers we face. We are also mindful of our social responsibilities to our communities outside of the higher education spaces.

Additionally, an invisible reality within race, gender, and Indigeneity in higher education is an underlying layer of colourism(s). Alice Walker (1983) introduced colourism and defined it as the prejudicial or preferential treatment of same–race people based on their colour. Beyond a ‘same–race’ focus, colourism(s) include intersections within and across different–race relations and encounters as well. We experience colourism expansively through the prejudicial

or preferential treatment based on colour in same-race relations and in different-race relations. A prejudicial or preferential treatment based on colour with and across the sameness/difference based on gender, Indigeneity, sexuality, nationality, culture, and more. Expressions of colourism in these intersections expose internal prejudices, preferences, and marginalized experiences within and between groups in higher education.

The most salient feature of colourism is the racialization of the non-white racialized. Anti-blackness exists throughout Oceania though it continues to be a sensitive topic within higher education (Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005). This anti-blackness is not the racism that Pacific peoples experience generally throughout Oceania but the anti-black sentiment or privileging of light skin over dark skin by members of Indigenous-indigenous communities. Anti-blackness exists not only in the settler-colonial contexts of New Zealand, Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, etc., but also in the anti-black exclusion of specific regions such as Melanesia, or specific Black nationalities such as Aboriginal, Papuan, or Fijian, to name a few. Within and throughout Indigenous-indigenous communities of darker colour, anti-blackness exists in covert tactics that harbour anti-black sentiments that are derived from both global Black Atlantic knowledge and local Black Pacific experience. This is visible in higher education through the absence of darker skinned Indigenous-indigenous peoples generally and Black Indigenous-indigenous scholars specifically.

Moana, Oceania, Pacific

Our reference to the terms “moana” and “Moana” is linked to the ocean and Oceania, a deliberate shifting of language and meaning to ground our position while seeking to encompass other parts of the region beyond a ‘lighter skinned Polynesia’. Pacific is also used however, to express how colonial and imperial ideologies have ongoing impacts on people, education, and knowledge. The various concepts and terms utilized in this paper highlight the complexities and nuances inherent in our indigenous knowledges and identities across the diaspora.

Moana-Pacific indigenous knowledges and practices in higher ed research

Talanoa is an established research method and continues to be debated within the academic literature, yet it is a form of knowledge production that extends beyond those boundaries (Fa'avae, Jones, & Manu'atu, 2016; Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014; Halapua & Pago, 2013; Kēpa & Manu'atu, 2006; Māhina, 2010; Vaioleti, 2006). In this paper, we ground talanoa as relationally mindful critical oratory, a form of talking story and critical dialogue through vulnerability, which reflects trust in a relationship yielding openness to share (Fa'avae, 2018). Talanoa gives language and theory to describe phenomena that are commonplace across the

Moana to co-produce knowledge and simultaneously negotiate relationships. We recognize that talanoa is similar to other forms of oratory, yet it is rooted in this paper as a Tongan concept that asserts the importance of relational protocols and community-based autonomous forms of knowledge production. Talanoa is a process of engaging meaningfully and intimately because contextually responsive protocols have successfully made or maintained good relations between participants.

Talanoa is both a process and a state of knowledge production when that which is tapu (sacred, protected) is rendered noa (calibrated, balanced), where a balance between mana (potency, honour) and tapu has occurred. In the case of people entering dialogue, it is a mediation of different personal energies that hold living history that, without calibration, limits openness and understanding. Manulani Aluli Meyer (2001) explains “knowledge is the by-product of dialogue ... of something exchanged ... a gift that occurs when one is in balance with another” (p. 134). This can be accomplished by generating mana through finding genealogical connection, gifting, presenting and drinking kava, or eating together, among other protocols. Access to knowledge through talanoa is founded on relational connections in stories that are shared or co-constructed (Kēpa & Manu‘atu, 2006; Māhina, 2010; Suaalii-Sauni & Aiolupotea, 2014; Tecun, Hafoka, ‘Ulu’ave, & ‘Ulu’ave-Hafoka, 2018).

Talanoa is premised on the necessity of closeness rather than distance. In Tonga and Samoa, vā relates to relational space (Ka‘ili, 2017; Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). Māori and Hawaiian’s refer to this similarly as “wa”, which is space and time (Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2020). Others have alluded to vā as the space in-between, or boundary which necessitates careful negotiation (Iosefo, 2016). Within migration and transnationalism discourse, indigenous researchers theorise vā as a way to highlight Pacific peoples’ fluid movements in the diaspora (Lilomaiaava-Doktor, 2004). Albert Refiti (2009) utilized vā within the architecture discipline as a way to decipher spaces and patterns within structures and how indigenous people are intricately connected to physical objects and the material world. An additional layer to vā is associated not only with the temporal space (relations between objects or things in the world), but with the liminal and spiritual inter-connections between the living and non-living (deity or spiritual being) (Fa’avae, 2018). When using indigenous concepts like vā, we are provided with a lens for deeper interrogation of the in-between connective spaces, where our place/position in relation with the land, sky, moana (ocean), fellow animals, and deities, affirms the significance of comprehending one’s relationship with other living and non-living things in our worlds.

As a derivative of vā, the notion of veitapui in lea Tonga (Tongan language) is symbolic of one’s connection-to or relation-with a higher being/creator/god thus indicating spiritual and sacred connectedness between people and a higher power. Churchward (2015) also defined

veitapui as the sacred connection between a brother and sister which is highly valued and respected in the Tongan culture. Māhina (2010) conceptualised tā-vā as a theoretical lens to understand the temporal, spatial, and spiritual relations between people and their worlds. The central premise of tā-vā is the notion that space (or context) cannot be comprehended entirely without considering time. Our intention to talanoa vā, ‘story through connective space’, is to honour the ethical, sacred, and spiritual negotiations of critical moments and encounters that heightened and challenged our perceptions as brown indigenous masculine researchers.

Talanoa vā – critical analysis of the intersections

To de-centre dominant western framings, we foreground ‘talanoa vā’, drawing from indigenous Pacific concepts that provide a critical analytical lens to unpack how indigenous masculinities is understood through negotiating the power relations within the intersections of indigeneity, race, and gender. During a talanoa between Sāmoan scholar, Tamasailau Sualii-Sauni, and the main author, their understanding of critical analysis from an indigenous lens includes engaging in processes of probing and interrogation that maintains the ethics of generosity and care that avoids people losing face (personal communication, 2020). The “critical” in relation to analytical work within talanoa vā calls to the fore concerns associated with power relations and of oppressive structures that are reproduced within higher education and consequently shape the intersections of indigeneity, race, and gender.

To talanoa vā is to acknowledge and ground Indigenous/indigenous scholarship and knowledge, honour those who have paved a way, and “pay heed to those who follow...and prepare a useful space for future generations” (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 198). We seek to talanoa vā through mindful probing and interrogation because of our commitment to mentoring and supporting the next generation of indigenous and minority scholars who will encounter moments whereby power and positionality further complicate and undermine their sense of being and becoming in Aotearoa. Moreover, we engage in talanoa vā because our intention is to disrupt harmful institutional practices by highlighting the processes that helped us mediate imbalanced power relations that exist between indigenous and non-indigenous, as well as within indigenous and other minority groups as well.

When talanoa vā is used to frame the intersections of race, colour, class, and gender within this paper, we engage in processes of negotiation. Thus, we acknowledge the specificities associated with layers of context and meaning that we each bring to our talanoa. Our engagement and interaction is governed by principles of faka‘apa‘apa (respect), loto toka‘i (care), and loto-fie-foaki (generosity), so, that we are able to share our differently similar views,

and confront oppressive structures with marginalized voices in a mainstream discourse. As we talanoa vā, we encourage other Oceania scholars to find their voices, and places, to speak about the ways in which they understand and negotiate the specificities, complexities, and nuances in their own lived experiences within higher education.

Talanoa and testimonio as methods

Talanoa is the approach that underpins our collaborative engagement and sense making as indigenous scholars. Through talanoa, we have been able to draw from Tongan concepts and language to articulate our experiences. At the same time, we utilize testimonio (bearing witness) as a form of re-presenting our reflexive and lived experiences as indigenous dark-skinned folk in higher education. We weave talanoa and testimonio together with care to honour their distinct genealogy and foundations. By weaving together talanoa with testimonio, we enable and care for ongoing conversations, analyses, and representations of indigenous knowledges and practices that are inclusive of our experiences across multiple contexts, oceans, and continents. We capture our individual and collective stories, weaved together with academic literature, our indigenous knowledges, and experience in place as residents in the Moana-Pacific.

Testimonio disrupts the apartheid of knowledge production in a eurocentric academy, drawing from sources beyond what is presently available in the hegemonic canons, which centers on subaltern knowers and knowledge (Bernal, 2002; Huber, 2009). Testimonio is a well-established method of speaking your truth, bearing witness to your lived experience, located within community, led by Latinx and Chicana critical theory and critical race theory educators as a counter-storytelling method in education (Flores & Garcia, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona (2012) explain that “within the field of education, scholars are increasingly taking up testimonio as a pedagogical, methodological, and activist approach to social justice that transgresses traditional paradigms in academia” (p. 363). Brabeck (2003) explains that testimonio differs from auto-biographical statements in that “testimonio is the expression not of a single autonomous account but of a collectively experienced reality” (p. 253) where the speaker gains credibility through communal relevance. Our integration of testimonio is because of its collaborative theoretical potential with talanoa ethics and processes. Brayboy (2005) argues further that, our stories as Indigenous people comprise our theories. Therefore, the ethical values and political potential of both Talanoa (relationally mindful storytelling) and Testimonio (testifying, bearing witness) broaden the theoretical intellectual-scape beyond the borders of the university, towards a more holistic higher education.

Talanoa and testimonio together provides a praxis that embodies processes of theorizing that enables an enactment of critical conversations that are meaningful to a collective 'us'. Our talatalanoa (collective ongoing talanoa) is positioned from our current place and location, within a particular period of time, and emphasizes counter-hegemonic narratives that foreground our voices and experiences (Ka'ili, 2017). Our indigeneity's fluidity and mobility is shaped in relation-to the diverse and multi-layered contexts we occupy (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019). Specifically, for this paper, our relation with Māori as tuākana/ta'okete, is that we are teina/tehina in this place where we presently exist. Moreover, politically, we also utilize Indigeneity as an indicator and analytical tool to disrupt and decolonize the dominant thinking and deficit practices that continue to pervade institutional processes at large in higher education generally. In other words, although we are not Māori or Indigenous to Aotearoa, our positionality as dark-skinned indigenous peoples in a western academic space nonetheless contributes to disrupting its inherited racial exclusion and colonial norm, through our very presence and unapologetic political identities.

In the next section, as part of our talatalanoa, we utilize testimonio to capture the ways in which we negotiate and honour lessons associated with race, gender, colour, and indigeneity.

Testimonio – capturing lessons

David Fa'avae's testimonio

Tecun's use of colourism in his testimonio reminds me of what it's like when Polynesians visit the Solomon Islands or Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). I am always confronted by being Polynesian, particularly Tongan, when I am in other parts of Oceania. There is an unspoken yet felt experience between Polynesian people and others from the region who are of darker skin colour. An experience, often linked to the historical and political struggles in the past within the Pacific, which further perpetuates the oppression of minority cultures within themselves. We not only confront the dominant western structures that oppress our knowledges and practices within universities, but the ways in which we ourselves continue the oppression.

Through Tecun and Siu'ulua, and ideas associated with colourism and testimonio, I am made aware of how our own positionalities within indigenous scholarly communities in Oceania, perpetuate oppressive practices that further marginalizes our own. Their experiences as indigenous dark-skinned in the US is different yet in some ways similar to Pacific in Aotearoa. Tecun and Siu'ulua present race and colourism and reminds me to be more conscious and critical of how oppression and marginalization are perpetuated in university systems and processes, even within minority peoples in Aotearoa.

More and more students from Oceania are enrolled in New Zealand and Australian universities to complete their formal higher education. So how does this impact the way institutions support those students? I think deconstructing the dominant processes which dis-empowers minority and indigenous researchers' sense of being and becoming within the university is key. When my family and I re-located to Aotearoa in 2020, I felt anxious. My anxiety was linked to the hope that universities were now accommodating of Pacific students'

knowledge and practices. Also, more and more Pacific staff, both academic and professional were dismissed from universities because of the performance expectations through PBRF. Would universities value my work and contribution towards knowledge-production?

When Mo'ale 'Otonuku and I were invited in 2019 to the He Vaka Moana symposium, organised at the University of Auckland by Drs. Hinekura Smith and 'Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki, the undergraduate students who attended the sessions shared their learning struggles. It triggered memories of my undergraduate days at the institution in the late nineties and early 2000s. Even after 20 years, why were students still feeling the same way? Why are Pacific students still underserved at university?

Arcia Tecun's Testimonio

Fa'avae's comments of how colourism is symbolic of regional exclusion and privileging across the Moana links to a tapu (protected, restricted, set apart) topic to discuss in higher ed, that of colourism among Indigenous scholars. Understandably, it is a sensitive topic to explore given each of our violent histories within colonialism and imperialism, and the traumas associated. The disparities of colourisms is the topic of privileged skin tone among Indigenous scholars where representation of lighter skinned scholars in many academic spaces far outnumber those with darker skin. As a darker skinned indigenous scholar in higher education and being part of many Indigenous and non-Indigenous spaces, I cannot help but wonder, where are all the darker folks? Why do all the darker folks sit together? The answers to these rhetorical questions I hope inspire more critical colour consciousness wherever we are positioned, because while I'm darker than most in my higher ed experience, there are darker skinned relatives I see even less of. While we reflect on this, I also do not believe we should exclusively reflect on ourselves. Instead, direct our criticism primarily toward the system of power that was intentionally made to make light, right.

Fa'avae's testimonio powerfully critiques notions of performance and high stakes requirements for scholars in tertiary education. He adds, this impacts what is valued in education, and observes that nothing has changed over the decades he has observed Indigenous exclusion in higher ed. Siu'ulua adds, the problematic and arbitrary values that are normalised in higher ed are tied to who has access and the lack thereof for Indigenous peoples. These sentiments connect with my own thoughts. I am not convinced the university is a universal answer, albeit universal access I think could be a start. Nor am I convinced the university can be 'Indigenized', because for that to happen I do not imagine it could still be a university as we know it. Meanwhile, I seek out the cracks and fissures where Indigeneity finds a place to grow or survive and expand. After all, our knowledge and places of origins as Indigenous peoples support these institutions. I also wonder how we as Indigenous scholars and students of life and community, who sometimes find ourselves in universities can re-conceptualize 'higher education' as an idea beyond university, even if it includes it? We certainly have our own traditions of knowledge production and institutions of specialized learning in a diverse spectrum of processes and levels.

My professional experience in colonial capitalist paradigms also includes that of doing three times the work for half the pay, and if there is to be any expansion of Indigeneity in the academy it must not only be locally and globally relevant and mindful, it must be materially transformed in a meaningful way. The practical actions that can begin to take place immediately includes the emotional and spiritual labour that goes into teaching, researching, upholding protocols, presenting hard truths, or having to confront the fragility or lack of investment from faculty, staff, colleagues, and students on these issues at times. This labour must be materially accounted for. One example is the relational ethics in sharing plenty of food, time, and energy, which are at present not the status quo, but instead relegated to personal or 'private' actions. Yet at the same time, it is what makes us valuable and different as Indigenous scholars. Indigenous

scholars in my view are community members, communal, and bring those intimate relational ethics with us. In order for that to flourish it must be materially accounted for and supported. Policies that include funding access for gifting is one way in which this can be done. At the University of Auckland, having provisions for koha (Māori gifting) as a graduate student and staff member is one such starting point I had not experienced at my previous institution in the US. This is an example of how Māori partnership benefits me and 'us'. Perhaps one day I will have a card and a budget as part of a 'good relations' policy for food, kava, and other koha or me'a 'ofa (Tongan for gift-ing) that I can use with colleagues, students, and community guests of the institution. I already do this using my own means, just like many Indigenous and Indigenous minded educators do. Like teachers who use their own wages to cover the physical material needs their classes require because the school doesn't provide enough. In the spirit of talatalanoa with Fa'avae and Siu'ulua, seeking possibilities that work better are just a few ways I imagine we can begin to transform 'higher ed' towards an education that includes Indigenous ethics and social/relational skills, which are foundational to our epistemologies and ontologies.

Sione Siu'ulua's Testimonio

Fa'avae and Tecun's testimonio and observation of colourism in the Moana and the tensions of being indigenous in higher education are far too familiar as I too have navigated my way through academia in the states as an undergrad, and as an Indigenous scholar and PhD candidate in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although my degrees from university and current postgraduate degree have provided me with many privileges and opportunities, I acknowledge that university or schooling is not the only method of education. The myth of university is the delusion that to be schooled is to be educated, and that to be educated is to be schooled. Education and schooling are not mutually exclusive. But we can be educated without schooling and schooling does not always guarantee becoming educated or becoming an intellectual.

What we are taught within a Western capitalist system is that schooling will guarantee monetary success as we chase after a dream. The elitism of schooling and university is that because of its exclusiveness and non-universal access, it is seen as a privilege where, compared to both global and national scales, the majority of the world populations do not have the opportunities to 'higher' education. This creates the delusion where if you go to university and obtain a degree, you are 'smart' and anything outside of schooling is less-than or uneducated. The irony is that as capitalism and neoliberalism continue to fail, tuition costs has risen dramatically, making higher education even more exclusive and less accessible to Indigenous peoples.

The exclusivity of university and schooling has made it synonymous with being educated and successful. Within my communities in Tonga, New Zealand, and the states, I am often praised for my schooling accomplishments. I am currently living in Tonga and when people know that I am a PhD candidate, I am regularly asked about the difficulty of my schooling. I often jokingly but critically reply, "no, going to the bush and farming is hard work." I say this to challenge these ideas of schooling. Because most don't have access to university, we must normalise that there is no shame in not going and show praise to the knowledge of those who do not have the opportunity. Currently, there is great work being done here in Tonga that highlights these ideas. Tongan woman and intellectual Haitelinisia Afemui 'Uhila Angilau documents and highlights stories of individuals and families on the facebook page Ordinary Tongan Lives, many of which are not formally schooled. She shares their struggles, successes, and education. Through their 'ordinary' stories we embrace their lives as being extraordinary and highly educated which shows that schooling is not exclusive to education. As Tecun and Fa'avae have shared possibilities in transforming the university, let us not forget the work to be done beyond the university, to eliminate the delusion that schooling and education are mutually exclusive.

Talatalanoa – discussion

Indigenous masculinities provided a framing for three indigenous and cisgendered men to make sense of our social and sacred responsibilities to each other and other Indigenous–indigenous scholars within a university setting in New Zealand. It provided a critical space to confront and negotiate power relations and key ideas linked to the marginalization and oppression of indigenous academics themselves. The use of indigenous concepts and approaches, like talanoa vā, enabled the critical probing of the intersections whereby indigeneity, race, gender, and colourism confronted the systemic barriers and social relations that continue to undermine Indigenous–indigenous people and knowledges.

Talanoa and testimonio data captured the ways in which we confronted and made sense of assumptions that a racial “indigeneity” is a sufficient indicator of one’s affiliation to a decolonial aim to dismantle systems of marginalization in higher education. Though such decolonial attempts, the intersections of racism and colourism have called to the fore an imperative for indigenous scholars in the Moana to be aware of and mindful of being dark or light skin, and how such distinctions can perpetuate racial marginalization and anti-blackness in institutions of higher education. Honouring our diversities and specificities requires cultural tools like talanoa vā that highlight the richness and complexities between Pacific indigeneity and indigenous masculinities.

Honouring people and place is a key principle and practice amongst Indigenous cultures. Maintaining the ethics of our vā with Māori in Aotearoa is a sacred engagement (Sualii-Sauni, 2017). Our relational positionality to Māori scholars in higher education can be understood, in part, through the tuākana–teina or ta‘okete–tehina relationship and our ancestral kinship as people of Moana–nui–a–kiwa (Pacific Ocean), demonstrated through ‘I’ and ‘i’. On another level, our bi-cultural and political responsibilities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi requires us to honour Māori from the view that we, like other non-Māori in Aotearoa are obligated to uphold Māori self-determination. Pacific academics must learn to pay close attention to when we promote our needs and agendas so that they do not undermine Māori peoples’. When Māori succeed, the Moana succeeds.

Honouring our relations—with Pacific women academics in higher education is a responsibility (as brothers) to uphold this veitapui (Churchward, 2015; Hoskins, 2000; Tengan, 2002). Disrupting conditions of marginalized power that cisgendered indigenous men hold in relation to women in the institution is an attempt to honour the veitapui with our sisters and further encourage the growth of diverse Pacific academics at universities (Naepi, 2019). By honouring indigenous women’s knowledge in academia, we enact a consideration of other

indigenous people who are marginalized in higher education because of their sexual orientation and/or social class. This raises the need to continually further unpack race, gender, sexuality, and class that often have narrow understandings to the diverse social practices, contexts, and spaces that indigenous people experience within society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, Hokowhitu, 2012).

Negotiating new threads or realms of vā and how to balance or calibrate between different relationships is essential learning for Indigenous scholars in higher education. Maintaining different relational spaces and negotiating balance anew provides possibilities for re-thinking praxis. We can learn a lot from diverging binaries attached to race and gender by highlighting colourism and permeable layers of Indigeneity that provide possibilities beyond a prevailing rigid fixedness.

Conclusion

Navigating higher education is a complex yet necessary learning process that requires negotiation and mediation. Despite our diverse cultural and learning experiences across multiple contexts in the diaspora, we are not only confronted by issues of race and gender codes, it is also through such differences that can bring us into solidarity together in this space. We provided insights to negotiate and mediate the institutional processes that are imposed on and confront indigenous scholars' learning and relational positionality. Talanoa vā and testimonio have been conducive methods of re-presenting reflexive stories and knowledge that simultaneously honour the relational ethics we hold in Aotearoa.

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