

Our Search for Intergenerational Rhythms as Tongan Global Scholars

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(Re)crafting Creative Criticality: Indigenous Intergenerational Rhythms and Post-COVID Desires

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Article abstract

Our search for collective meaning-making across spaces and places as Tongan global scholars carries intergenerational rhythms. This article is a diasporic collaboration between members of the Tongan Global Scholars Network (TGSN), an online cultural collective drawn together through creatively critical rhythms and a desire to make space for ongoing criticalities through Tongan concepts, knowledge, and approaches. Employing the art of e-talanoa in our search for ways of crafting meaning, we unfold our narratives about TGSN's humble beginnings using a range of modalities expressed as words, images, screenshots, and poetry. Our desire to connect early career scholars of Tongan heritage across the diaspora of Australia, the United States of America, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Tonga via the online space, led to enabling intergenerational relational rhythms between more seasoned and emerging scholars, sharing their understanding of Tongan knowledge and its relevance in the dominant Western academe. Intergenerational rhythms are central to TGSN's survival. As a global network, TGSN continues to provide meaningful spaces for creatively critical meaning-making and intergenerational collaborative dialogue.

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OUR SEARCH FOR INTERGENERATIONAL RHYTHMS AS TONGAN GLOBAL SCHOLARS

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Dagmar Dyck is a first-generation New Zealander of Tongan (Vava'u), German, Dutch, and Polish ancestries. She is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher, art educator, and Doctoral Candidate at the University of Auckland.

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Gemma Malungahu is the daughter of Kelepi and Silina Malungahu and the granddaughter of Alisi Lupe Pole Fetu'u and Sosaia Hiva Pea 'Ulu Fetu'u (maternal grandparents) and Sosefo Malungahu and Leonia Malungahu (paternal grandparents). She is a Research Fellow at The Australian National University.

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'Esiteli Hafoka received her PhD and MA in Religious Studies from Stanford University, and her BA in Religious Studies and Ancient History from UC Riverside. Her research introduces a novel theoretical approach, Angafakafonua as Tongan epistemology, to understand Tongan collective identity in the United States of America.

Finausina Teisa Tovo is the Founder and Coordinator for the Mana Pacific Studies Learning Community at the College of San Mateo. As a first-generation Tongan American and educational leader with ties to Oceania, she has dedicated the last decade to representing Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander voices within academia.

David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae is the grandson of Sione Taufui Mikato Fa'avae and Vika Lataheanga Fositā (paternal grandparents) and Melenaitē Jennings and Sione P. Tomasi (maternal grandparents). He is a senior academic in the School of Critical Studies in Education, and an Associate Professor at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland.

Abstract: Our search for collective meaning-making across spaces and places as Tongan global scholars carries intergenerational rhythms. This article is a diasporic collaboration between members of the Tongan Global Scholars Network (TGSN), an online cultural collective drawn together through creatively critical rhythms and a desire to make space for ongoing criticalities through Tongan concepts, knowledge, and approaches. Employing the art of e-talanoa in our search for ways of crafting meaning, we unfold our narratives about TGSN's humble beginnings using a range of modalities expressed as words, images, screenshots, and poetry. Our desire to connect early career scholars of Tongan heritage across the diaspora of Australia, the United States of America, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Tonga via the online space, led to enabling intergenerational relational rhythms between more seasoned and emerging scholars, sharing their understanding of Tongan knowledge and its relevance in the dominant Western academe. Intergenerational rhythms are central to TGSN's survival. As a global network, TGSN continues to provide meaningful spaces for creatively critical meaning-making and intergenerational collaborative dialogue.

Keywords: e-talanoa; creatively critical meaning-making; cultural collective; intergenerational rhythms; Tongan Global Scholars Network (TGSN)

you say that you think
therefore you are
but thinking belongs
in the depths of the earth
we simply borrow
what we need to know
("Thinking," Thaman, 1999, p.15, first stanza)

Thaman's poem shows us that thinking is a shared practice between humans and the more-than-human world. The fonua (land as well as people) including the vahaope (space beyond and in-between islands)¹ are spaces that continue to shape Oceania peoples' thinking and understanding (Fehoko et al., 2022). During a time of physical restrictions across our Tongan diaspora contexts and our homelands in Tonga, 2020 heralded a new era for Tongan educators, researchers, and practitioners alike. As we do, when roadblocks occur, we get creative; in this case, we navigated a way around the ebbs and flows of COVID-19 variant waves and related regulations that threatened our progressive work in education and research (Enari & Faleolo, 2020). The desire to stay socially connected and to remain productive during campus lockdowns and travel restrictions led to the creation of online forums, including the Tongan Global Scholars Network (TGSN). The desire for a network began from initial e-talanoa (online dialogue) by Finausina Tovo, Edmond Fehoko, Sione Ata Siu'ulua, and David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae. TGSN was formally established in May 2021, and is an online cultural collective that has formed its own natural rhythms of (re)crafting creative criticality.

This article has relied on e-talanoa, a narrative approach developed by Pacific scholars in the diaspora. Inspired by Ruth (Lute) Faleolo's (2016; 2021) initial use of e-talanoa to capture intergenerational stories across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand pre-COVID-19, Fa'avae et al. (2022) further developed e-talanoa as a method to capture Pacific peoples' online engagement and conversations, grounded in the ethics of vā-relations.² e-talanoa's relevance to the TGSN stemmed from the way in which the global pandemic determined society's social interactions, which also included research engagement (Faleolo, 2023). Despite Indigenous Pacific scholar's concerns with misappropriating Indigenous practices like talanoa (Tunufa'i, 2016), grounding e-talanoa's relevance in the diaspora reflects the societal concerns and needs of our Pacific communities who were forced to engage in online learning and communication (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Fa'avae et al., 2022). Our e-talanoa stories and conversations are unfolded across this article in excerpts from dialogue captured online, reflexive recounts, imagery, and poetry. These multimodal forms of expression enable creative critical meaning-making.

The following sections portray the “act of crafting” and what it means to become “in the crafting” creatively critical scholars of Tongan heritage: first, the crafting and grounding of our positionality within TGSN; second, a story of TGSN’s development, outlining the network’s aims and humble beginnings during the pandemic, until current, post-COVID times; third, crafting through interweaving understandings, narratives, and images, providing insights into the sense-making and meaning-making processes taking place within the network.

Positionality as Tongan Scholars in Diaspora

According to Fa’avae (2019), the positionality of Tongan people, in relation to others, is shaped by their cultural experiences of time (tā) and space (vā)—both important aspects of our make-up as individuals (our age, history, generation, etc.) and as part of our collectives (our relationships and holistic connections to one another, be they spiritual, emotional, physical, etc.) (Fainga’a-Manu Sione et al., 2024; Ka’ili, 2005). Most of us (authors) are first- or second-generation Tongans in tu’a Tonga (outside of Tonga, diaspora). Although our experiences—of attaining higher education or entering research or teaching posts in academia—have been vast, we all attribute our success to the village who raised and supported us on our journeys. So, it is not surprising that each author mentions their parents, their villages, their Pasifika research, or the communities that they belong to in their biographical statements or narratives.

Most of us have received higher education qualifications in tu’a Tonga, and so a lot of what we have learnt about our cultural identity as Tongans, or of anga faka-Tonga (the Tongan way), has been from our parents or grandparents, or, in some instances, from other key family members, and church or community leaders. Since we have received these teachings as an inheritance from our elders, whether in tu’a Tonga or in Tonga, we realise that such gifts of knowledge and cultural understandings are not just for ourselves. In fact, it is our responsibility to pass on our heritage to the next generation. It is with this calling, in mind and in heart, that we have come together as members of the TGSN, to creatively (re)tell our shared journey as Tongan scholars since 2021.

The creation of TGSN was a significant event and process; one that stemmed from our shared cultural identities as Tongans and our desire to stay connected. We maintained our vā, while sharpening our academic minds with critical talanoa³, and refining our research, as well as practice. Each time we met as a collective, the protocol of fakafe’iloaki (to greet and introduce each other) helped us to make genealogical, social, or cultural connections. In the same vein, we do this here by stating who we are

connected to, where we come from, and who we are in relation to others, as Tongan scholars:

Dr. Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, daughter of pastors 'Ahoia 'Ilaiū (from Mu'a and Pukotala) and Falakika Lose 'Ilaiū (from Houma and Ha'alalo), is a New Zealand-born Tongan. She teaches in Australia and is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at La Trobe University. Her research considers Pasifika mobilities, collective agencies, and multi-sited cultivation of cultural heritage.

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Dagmar Dyck is a first-generation New Zealander of Tongan (Vava'u), German, Dutch, and Polish ancestries. She is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher, art educator, and Doctoral candidate at the University of Auckland.

Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai is the daughter of Ongo'a Toloke and Seini Kalolina Hafu. She is an Equity Practitioner and a PhD Candidate at the University of Queensland. Hafu-Fetokai's work, and research focuses on the experience of Pasifika students in higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

Dr. Gemma Malungahu is the daughter of Kelepi and Silina Malungahu. She is the granddaughter of Alisi Lupe Pole Fetu'u and Sosaia Hiva Pea 'Ulu Fetu'u (maternal grandparents), as well as Sosefo Malungahu and Leonia Malungahu (paternal grandparents). Malungahu is a research fellow at The Australian National University.

Dr. Zaramasina L Clark is of Tongan/Palangi heritage but was born and raised in Suva, Fiji. She is a Lecturer in the School of Biological Science at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington.

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These personal statements have been written by each author and are shared here with the purpose of making ourselves transparent as Tongans, as is our protocol of fakafe'iloaki (introduction and acknowledgement of one another) to pukepuke fonua—a Tongan way of maintaining language, the cultural ways of connecting, communicating, and maintaining vā.

Creative Critical Research and Meaning-Making

At a time of increased social restrictions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequential physical limitations of working from home forged the desire to build and maintain social networks using the vahaope (other spaces beyond and in-between our islands, including online).

Opportunities to Connect with Others, Beyond the Physical

The development of TGSN was an opportunity to connect with other Tongan creatives, particularly during lockdowns while working from home. In the following statement, Dagmar Dyck captured the value of staying connected as a Tongan creative. As a TGSN member, she was asked what it means to be a Tongan creative. Dyck responded:

I have never had a teacher or lecturer reflect me throughout my compulsory schooling or Fine Arts study. I graduated with a PGDip FA in 1995, however, this academic recognition signals a one-dimensional competence within a western educational construct. It has only been recently, during my master's research, that my supervisor was of Pacific heritage. As a result, much of my career has been in a space of isolating pioneering work. The environment of being comfortable with the unknown is the natural territory of creatives, where reliance on inner beliefs, a quest to never accept the status quo, and the critical thinking required to keep delving, developing, and trusting the creative processes requires levels of vulnerability and curiosity to manifest our ideas (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Social Standing, I & II, 2023



Note: (Re)presentation of Dagmar Dyck's creative criticality. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas 1000 x 2000mm

Dyck is a Tongan, German, Dutch, and Polish creative and educator, whose work crosses diverse cultural and disciplinary boundaries. As she explains:

Undoubtedly, my ongoing journey to understand my role as a creative with Tongan heritage has occurred outside the walls of formal institutions. Well-meaning teachers and lecturers struggled to connect me to sources of authentic meaning resulting in self-efficacy; this was vital to my early field research. Books such as *Artificial Curiosities: Being an Exposition of Native Manufactures* (Kaepler, 1978) and *The Art of Tonga: Ko e Ngaahi 'Aati' o Tonga* (Cartmail, 1997), combined with museum collections, became pivotal connectors to my sense-making. It will come as no surprise that my greatest learnings have come through talanoa at the feet of my elders and family, both here in tu'a Tonga and Tonga. I can only speak to my experience as a first-generation New Zealand-born woman of Tongan, German, Dutch, and Polish ancestry. These bloodlines speak to ancestors and cultures that stretch across the globe, and defining myself as a Tongan creative is too narrow a descriptor.

TGSN has been an intergenerational space for Tongan scholars, like Dyck, to share their research and knowledge, and to co-create understandings of being Tongan — crossing boundaries set by academia, as well as self-imposed conditions that arise from living in tu'a Tonga, and the often repressed Western ideologies of Pacific peoples (Thaman, 2003).

Talanoa Tauhi Fonua

Talanoa (the act of storying, to talk) to tauhi fonua (maintain/care for our sociocultural connections to Tonga; people and place) is a responsibility we each carry as Tongan scholars. We have been entrusted such responsibility to pukepuke fonua (hold onto and keep alive the people and places of Tonga) by our ancestors, our families, and communities; those who have supported our success in academia and entrust their knowledge with us to progress our collectives. This role of tauhi fonua, or pukepuke fonua, is important to us as Tongan scholars; the maintenance and nurturing of our Tongan-ness in tu'a Tonga (diaspora) and in Tonga is shared by all Tongans who “make it” in life. Whether it is raising children, teaching, science and research development, sports, business, religion, crafts, building, or creative music and performing arts, et cetera—each of us feels collective pride in our red and white flag and would readily represent our island kingdom of Tonga. Our talanoa is a way in which we uphold our affinity with anga faka-Tonga and tauhi fonua.

TGSN talanoa sessions have been a progressive safe space for Tongan scholars to tauhi fonua, while speaking and thinking critically and creatively about ideas, interests, current events, research, and practice. Our collaborative activities and ongoing dialogue demonstrate intergenerational sense-making and meaning-making, occurring on a global scale for us as Indigenous educators and researchers working in between multi-sited contexts of non-Indigenous diaspora spaces and Oceania homeland contexts.

TGSN Connectivity

In this section, we ground our positionality made transparent in our introductions, by sharing our connectivity and intersections that led to the formation of TGSN and, inevitably, the formalisation of our membership in this global, interdisciplinary network. Each of the following talanoa excerpts captures our reflexive memories, as authors, of how we each were introduced to or became involved in the global network, which later became the TGSN. These recollections are in a chronological order of events.

David Fa'avae

The research work of senior Tongan scholars is well respected by Pacific scholars in general within the diaspora, yet the next generation of researchers across diverse disciplinary fields are not always connected to the critical theorising of our predecessors. After connecting with Finausina, Edmond, and Ata, our intention was for TGSN to become a critical hub responsible for advancing Tongan thought, philosophising, and theorising. With the impact of COVID-19, 2020-2021 provided an opportunity to connect Tongan scholars across the diaspora through online modes of communication. Having such a hub would bridge the intergenerational distance between our Tongan senior and emerging scholars. It would also provide an opportunity to capture comparatively the ways Tongan knowledge and ways of living and becoming have been undone and grounded in new fonua/whenua/lands, the settler nations of Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and the United States (Faleolo, 2021; Fehoko et al., 2022; Prendergast, 2023). In 2022, our executive team grew and, to cater for Tongan researchers across sites, three teams were established across Australia, the United States, and Aotearoa New Zealand. The Australian executive team consisted of Ruth Faleolo, Gemma Malungahu, and Cathleen Fetokai, who were tasked with connecting with emerging and early career scholars in their location. Finausina Tovo, 'Esiteli Hafoka, Wesley Hingano, and Steve Petelo led from Turtle Island, the United States. Edmond Fehoko, Zaramasina Clark, Sione Ata Siu'ulua, and Dagmar Dyck made up Aotearoa New Zealand's executive team.

Edmond Fehoko

As commented earlier, the numbers of Tongan researchers and amount of research involving Tongan peoples were increasing in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States of America. As a result, new and contemporary ideas and insights were generated. Whilst there was an informal engagement pre-COVID-19 with early career Tongan researchers, a talanoa with Dr David Fa'avae saw the birth of the Tongan Global Scholars Network. Through our personal and professional networks, we reached out to Tongan scholars across the globe. At the same time, we still maintained ties with our well-respected Tongan scholars who have paved the pathway for Tongan knowledge to be discussed in the field of academia (see Fehoko et al., 2022).

Gemma Malungahu

I recall taking part in the initial meeting for a Tongan scholar's group in early April 2021, and being sent a doodle poll—by Associate Professor David Fa'avae titled *Tongan Early Career Scholars in the Diaspora*—to arrange a time to discuss what is now called the TGSN. At the time, being an early career researcher and having started a new appointment as a Pacific Research Fellow with The

Australian National University, I knew it was important to network with like-minded Tongan scholars across the globe. This unique multidisciplinary group allows us to learn from one another, and the thread that ties us together is our Tongan heritage and our love for the Kingdom of Tonga.

Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai

I commenced my doctoral candidacy at the same time universities throughout Australia closed their campuses to transition all academic activities online due to COVID-19. To remain connected with other Pasifika scholars in the diaspora, I attended an online talanoa series where Ruth (Lute) Faleolo and Charmaine 'Ilaiū Talei delivered a joint representation. It was through this connection I was invited to attend the first TGSN talatalanoa. I was able to reconnect with David Fa'avae, who has been instrumental in the establishment of the TGSN. This network is like a lifejacket for many of us in the diaspora, navigating the often-stormy seas of academia. The TGSN is like a faka-famili (family meeting, see Figure 2). The TGSN has also allowed us to be unapologetically Tongan, from our gold teeth to our Tongan ta'ovala, we come together to preserve and progress being a Tongan in the diaspora. Being a female scholar of Tongan heritage is about representing the fonua that I originate from, Tonga. It means the family names I carry. It means my children have an opportunity to succeed beyond my achievements. It means respecting the knowledge holders before me. It means an opportunity to advance others in understanding our research as Tongan scholars.

Ruth (Lute) Faleolo

After having worked alongside David Fa'avae and other Pacific academics from August 2020 to January 2021 (on a trans-Tasman project critiquing the development of e-talanoa as a research method (Fa'avae et al., 2022)), our vā māfana across the Tasman—in multi-sites in Aotearoa and Australia—prompted us to stay in touch for more fruitful talatalanoa (via Zoom) about our various ideas for further collaborations as early career academics. It was in April 2021 that I received and accepted an email invitation from Fa'avae to attend a Zoom meeting with other Tongan academics, subject header: “Tongan Early Career Scholars in the diaspora.” For me, this was an opportunity to connect with fellow Tongans during a time of uncertainty about the academic pathways we were navigating at the time, especially during the pandemic. It was the start of an important process of exploration and (re)creating social interconnectedness—paving the way for intergenerational sense-making and meaning-making, mastering our understandings of tauhi vā in a myriad of online forums geared towards knowledge sharing and knowledge forming.

Zaramasina Clark

He Pito Mata Early Career Wānanga in Wellington in 2021, David Fa'avae connected with a group of Aotearoa-based Tongan early career researchers. As part of the Pacific Early Career Researcher (ECR) Collective, a wider group of Pacific ECRs, they embarked on a series of talatalanoa over Zoom. The Collective unpacked notions of research excellence to articulate the connections between their research, personal experiences, and relational and collective excellence (Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective, 2022). Through this work, Dr. David Fa'avae also encouraged the Tongan ECRs in the Collective to connect with the TGSN in 2021. The TGSN continues to facilitate the development of emerging Tongan scholars, connecting us to established and esteemed Tongan academics whilst encouraging exploration of our own positionality (in my case, overseas-born, non-fluent Tongan-speaking, female) and how that shapes our scholarship. The TGSN has also provided fertile grounds for connection and collaboration between Tongan scholars, despite physical, geographical, and perceived disciplinary boundaries.

Crafting Words, Crafting Worlds, Together

In this section we provide an historical outline of the development of the TGSN outlining its aims and humble beginnings, during the start of the pandemic. Aspects of this development and the persons involved have been briefly mentioned in some of the positionality statements above. In the following sections we will outline the vision of the TGSN, as well as unpack the ways in which objectives were carried out to engage Tongan scholars.

The Start

The desire to create a hub for Tongan emerging/early career scholars across the globe came out of talanoa (conversations) with senior Pacific scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand. Fa'avae explains:

I was given a one-year postdoctoral fellowship in 2020, by the University of Auckland's Faculty of Arts, to support Associate Professor Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni's work on securing the co-development of a centre of research excellence for Pacific scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand. This, however, did not eventuate as we had hoped, especially in the time we were given. That situation led to talanoa with Finausina Tovo, Edmond Fehoko, and Sione Ata Siu'ulua in early 2021. Not only was our vision to provide a collective global hub for early career

researchers (ECRs) and postgraduate students of Tongan heritage, but that the collaboration would equip ECRs to eventually help lead from their own locales.

As recorded by Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai (Figure 2), it was on May 27, 2021, at 5 pm New Zealand time, that Wesley Hingano our first presenter shared his research. He was working on his PhD at the time. David Fa'avae recalls that, a few months after further talanoa with members, in August 2021, during a conversation with 'Esiteli Hafoka, there was a name change from Tongan Global Scholars to Tongan Global Scholars Network (TGSN). Discussion around the vision of the TGSN followed.

Figure 2

TGSN Talanoa by Wesley Hingano



Note: This image was taken on 27.05.21 by Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai, during a TGSN Talanoa by Wesley Hingano.

The Vision

In September 2021, a vision statement was formulated by representatives from the United States, Australia, and New Zealand executive teams. As can be seen in the Appendix to this article, our *Vision Statement & Goals* unpack the vision/vision of the network, which is to “Fakakoloa ‘a e to’utangata Tonga: To connect, inspire, empower, and nurture Tongan emergent researchers, scholars, and educators across the globe.” The vision document outlines four key mission goals.

The second and fourth goals are highlighted here since they pertain to the focus of this article:

- 2) To ground, articulate, and critique Tongan research methodologies, methods, approaches, frameworks, and concepts through creative (ongomālie) and critically meaningful (‘uhingamālie) modes of interpretation, expression, and meaning-making.
- 4) To nurture intergenerational mentoring and learning between emergent and more experienced researchers, scholars, and educators.

Both mission goals clearly state the intentions of the TGSN to promote intergenerational and relevant sense-making/meaning-making. These important processes have taken place online, using talatalanoa sessions (Fa’avae 2021; Ka’ili, 2017). The term talatalanoa is derived from the word talanoa, which, when enacted in our Tongan contexts of communication, becomes a storying or conversing that is free-flowing. It can either be about a certain topic, or not, and is a form of to-and-fro dialogue with the purpose of building a vā māfana and reaching an understanding of either the topic, or of each other as connected individuals. Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai likens this regular gathering of TGSN members to a common familial practice in Tongan homes, of faka-famili⁴ (family gatherings, usually at the end of the day, for prayer and dialogue, storying and sharing of the day’s events, or called to plan and discuss familial or communal events). She presents her thoughts on this comparison in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparative Aspects of Faka-famili and TGSN Talatalanoa

Table 1. Comparative Aspects of Faka-famili and TGSN Talatalanoa

Aspect of event	Faka-famili	TGSN Talatalanoa
Purpose	Gather to discuss matters relevant to the family.	Meet to hear about research conducted by Tongan scholars in the diaspora.
Opening	Welcome and opening prayer	Welcome and opening prayer
Main Event	Senior members or host family will discuss why the meeting was called, and the matters relevant to the family; this could be about an up-coming event (birthday, reunion etc.) and what is required to ensure the event is successful.	A Tongan scholar is invited to the share their research to the network.
Greater understanding of what needs to be achieved or how our shared knowledge can be transformative.	Family members will discuss what they can assist with, or further conversations will take place.	At the conclusion of the talatalanoa, members can ask questions or make recommendations.
Closing	Family/senior member thanks everyone and closes the meeting in prayer.	Host member thanks the presenter and the members for attending and closes the talatalanoa with a prayer.
Event takes place	Family event is held (birthday or reunion, etc.) and is successful due to the faka-famili.	Members of TGSN meet in Tonga in-person for the first-time. It has a feeling of family members coming together to support and encourage each other at the conference. The TGSN allows us to come together as a collective, working in tu'a Tonga to preserve and progress our Tongan knowledge as scholars.
Next faka-famili/talatalanoa	Family members will feel excited to meet and discuss ways of tauhi vā.	Members of the TGSN feel excited to come together and further support the objectives of the TSGN, they may also bring new members and new initiatives to tauhi vā, until we meet again in-person.

The repetition of *tala* in *tala-tala-noa* emphasises an ongoing process of storytelling, dialogue, or conversation (Ka'ili, 2017). Thus, talatalanoa is a Tongan method of ongoing dialogue and conversation (Fa'avae, 2021) that was used by the TGSN online, specifically via the Zoom e-talanoa sessions (Fa'avae et al., 2022). This approach of Indigenising online forums is similar to that of other Pacific online dialogue methodologies used by Pacific researchers during the pandemic (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Fa'avae et al., 2022; Faleolo, 2021; Faleolo, 2023). As outlined above and in the Appendix, the online talatalanoa sessions brought together Tongan scholars across various places and spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, United States, and Tonga, to learn and grow as a community.

Crafting Understandings: Interweaving Narratives, Imagery, and Insights

In this section we provide an interweaving of TGSN narratives, images, and insights into the TGSN sense-making and meaning-making processes over the duration of its intergenerational knowledge sharing and knowledge making. This section gives us scope to use imagery to share further insights into our sense-making and meaning-making processes as a network.

As described by Dagmar Dyck:

Intergenerational talanoa between senior and early career researchers speaks to the Pacific conceptions of elders as knowledge holders and elder pedagogy to maintain and transform Pacific knowledge (Dyck, 2021). Holmes and Gonzalez (2017) argue that when schools recognize that elders hold the language, culture, and knowledge within their Pacific communities, there is opportunity for creating meaningful connections to Indigenous ways of knowing and collective processes of knowledge production. Situating elders amongst the younger generation supports the collective survival, continuance, and transformation of Indigenous education and culturally sustainable pedagogical practices.

The TGSN executive committee meets regularly to discuss the annual schedule of intergenerational speakers. Our activities as a committee and network were well-documented from the start. Our online Google files, entitled *Tongan Storm*, form an ongoing collation of all presentations, recordings, shared dissertations/theses, methodologies publications, annual calendars of planned activities, key readings, event media and communication, including a network register of bio and contact details, as well as other useful resources. These shared files were used to draw out some emerging themes across the activities and discussions arising within the network. In the

following sections, we unpack these emerging themes: Tongan cultural heritage, Tongan academic journeys of success, Tongan cultural identity, and Tongan cultural experience.

Tongan Cultural Heritage

Tongan cultural heritage is a major focus of our network's discussions. A key reason that cultural heritage is a major focus is because so many members are in diaspora; we continue to make references to our Tongan heritage, either through our personal genealogical and familial biological ties, or through our cultural association with Tongans in our friendships and extended collectives, including our academic network. Our cultural heritage as Tongan-born or overseas-born Tongans draws us closer within the network, creating a unique space to celebrate in solidarity and to safely critique what we have inherited—and are sometimes challenged by—as Oceanic people navigating academia. The minutes from one online executive meeting (dated Monday, 31 October, 2022) revealed the committee's desire to promote discussions about our Tongan cultural heritage through the selection of its guest speakers for an end of year talatalanoa. The scheduled event, held on 1 December 2022, included four panellists who are representative of Tongan women scholars across our varied regions: Dr Melenaita Taumoefolau (School of Pacific Studies, University of Auckland); Dr Seu'ula Johansson-Fua (Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific); Professor Tu'uhevaha Kaitu'u-Lino (University of Melbourne, Australia); and Professor Halaevalu Fonongava'inga Ofahengaue Vakalahi (College of Health and Society, Hawaii Pacific University). Two key questions asked of these four scholars, relevant to the emerging theme of "Tongan cultural heritage" were:

- For each of you, what does it mean to be a female scholar of Tongan heritage?
- What does it mean to see/feel/do research and draw from Tongan cultural knowledge, practices, and communities in the contexts of tu'a Tonga (diaspora of the United States, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand) or Ioto-Tonga (within Tonga)?

As Tongan peoples we are first and foremost children of God, gifted to God by His Majesty King Tupou I, the land and all its inhabitants (including future generations and all living beings) — an act of *tuku fonua* — committing the land and people of Tonga to God. So, we pay allegiance to God and Tonga's King. HRH Angelika Lātūfuipeka Halaevalu Mata'aho Napua-o-kalani Tuku'aho, the eldest and only daughter of his Majesty King Tupou VI eloquently reminded us of our duties and responsibilities as Tongan women and men, in her book *Ko e Ngafa 'o e Fefine pea moe Tangata Tonga, The Essence of the Tongan Woman and Man: Duties and Responsibilities*. This text states that our Tongan essence— our oral histories and traditional customs— is to be maintained, revived, reinforced, and preserved in both Tonga and tu'a Tonga (HRH

Tuku'aho, 2022). Tuku'aho describes three key traditional customs that help guide our way of being as Tongan peoples. These are: reverence and respect, taboo, and the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities. Taboo (tapu) relates to the “awareness of oneself and limitations regarding others inclusive of places, rituals, words and mannerisms” (HRH Tuku'aho, 2022, pp.170-171). The essence of our Tongan-ness, our cultural heritage, is observed in our actions within our kinship (kainga) where we uphold our roles and responsibilities in society and in the family. So, our cultural essence informs how we see, feel, and undertake research as Tongan scholars. As Professor Manulani Aluli Meyer states, as Pacific peoples, we simply see, feel, and hear the world differently (Professor Manulani Aluli Meyer, personal communication, 19 July 2023). Our processes of exploration—that of familiar and not-so-familiar cultural heritage, from our everyday lives, as Tongans living in tu'a Tonga or in our homelands, or from tales, materials and imagery passed down to us through our elders' storying — is expressed in our practice as artists, academics, and researchers. These understandings of cultural heritage and discoveries of truths are shared within the network freely to inspire cultural strengthening. An example of this happening in the network was in Talanoa session #10, in May 2022 (Figure 3). Talanoa #10, titled *Kupesi⁵ Kulture: Re-imagining the art of commemoration*, celebrated Aotearoa's community of Tongan artists. Three guest speakers focused on the research and practices located in tu'a Tonga. Whilst all artists were practicing in Aotearoa New Zealand, their creative critical knowledge and practices were still deeply anchored in the old practices of our Tongan ancestors. A presentation of *Kupesi Peau Ongō: Patterning Sound Waves* by artist Dr Sione Faletau (Figure 4), alongside *Tohi Kumi Koloa* by artist 'Uhila Nai (Figure 5), and *Ko e anga ha o mau fonua* by artist Terje Koloamatangi (Figure 6) were evidence of each artist reimagining the kupesi artform.

Figure 3.
TGSN Flyer

Talanoa 10
Tongan Global Scholars

Kupesi Kulture: Re-imagining the art of commemoration

AOTEAROA'S COMMUNITY OF TONGAN ARTISTS

Day and time, May 2022

- Thu 19, 11am (Sydney)
- Thu 19, 11am (Brisbane)
- Thu 19, 2pm (Tonga)
- Thu 19, 1pm (Aotearoa-NZ)
- Wed 18, 6pm (S/Francisco)
- Wed 18, 8pm (N/Dakota)
- Wed 18, 3pm (Hawaii)

Zoom Link
<https://waikato.zoom.us/j/86158664923>

Speakers

- Dr Sione Faletau, Artist, *University of Auckland*
- Terje Koloamatangi, Tufunga Tātatau, *Auckland University of Technology (AUT)*
- 'Uhila Nai, Doctoral Candidate, *Auckland University of Technology, (AUT)*

Facilitator
Dagmar Dyck, *University of Auckland*

Abstract
Celebrating the ever-growing depth and talent of Aotearoa's community of Tongan arts, this session focuses on the research and practices of three exciting artists, 'Uhila Nai, Terje Koloamatangi and Dr Sione Faletau. Whilst all are geographically located in tu'atonga, their creatively critical knowledge systems are deeply anchored in the old practices of our ancestors. What drives these artisans to pull apart, re-examine and re-define methods and spaces to aptly reflect their sense-making of being Tongan? With kupesi as the common denominator, each artist offers unique perspectives in reimagining the artform of commemoration and how it interrelates with their chosen medium. We welcome you to join this first-ever 'Aati' focused talatalanoa.

Note: TGSN Flyer advertising Talanoa session #10, emailed to the network by the Aotearoa New Zealand executive team.

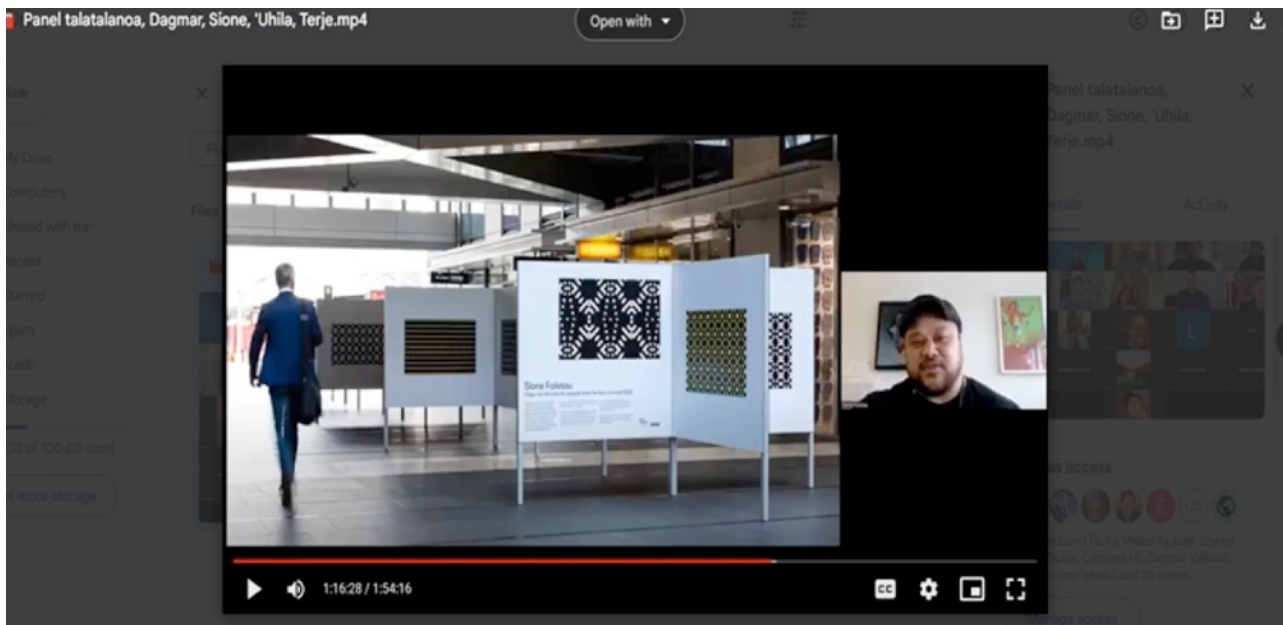
Celebrating Tongan Artists and Re-imagining Tongan Art

Kupesi Peau Ongu: Patterning Sound Waves

Dr. Sione Faletau is an artist and multidisciplinary scholar, born in Auckland with Tongan heritage. He has links to the villages of Tanunga, Vava'u and Lakepa, Tongatapu. He uses art as a vehicle to explore his Tongan heritage, and this has led him to undertake doctoral research on Tongan masculinity from an Indigenous perspective (Faletau, 2020). His artistic expressions in *Kupesi Peau Ongu* utilizes field recordings of environments, such as songs, hymns, and vocal recordings from familiar Tongan spaces. An extraction of the audio wave spectrum from these recordings provides a range of high, medium, and low frequencies that can be viewed and manipulated to create kupesi designs⁶. This is an innovative way of seeing kupesi within contemporary diaspora contexts (Beauchamp, 2022).

Figure 4

Dr. Sione Faletau presenting 'Kupesi Peau Ongu: Patterning Sound Waves'



Note: Screenshot of New Zealand-based artist Dr. Sione Faletau presenting *Kupesi Peau Ongu: Patterning Sound Waves* during the May 2022 talanoa session.

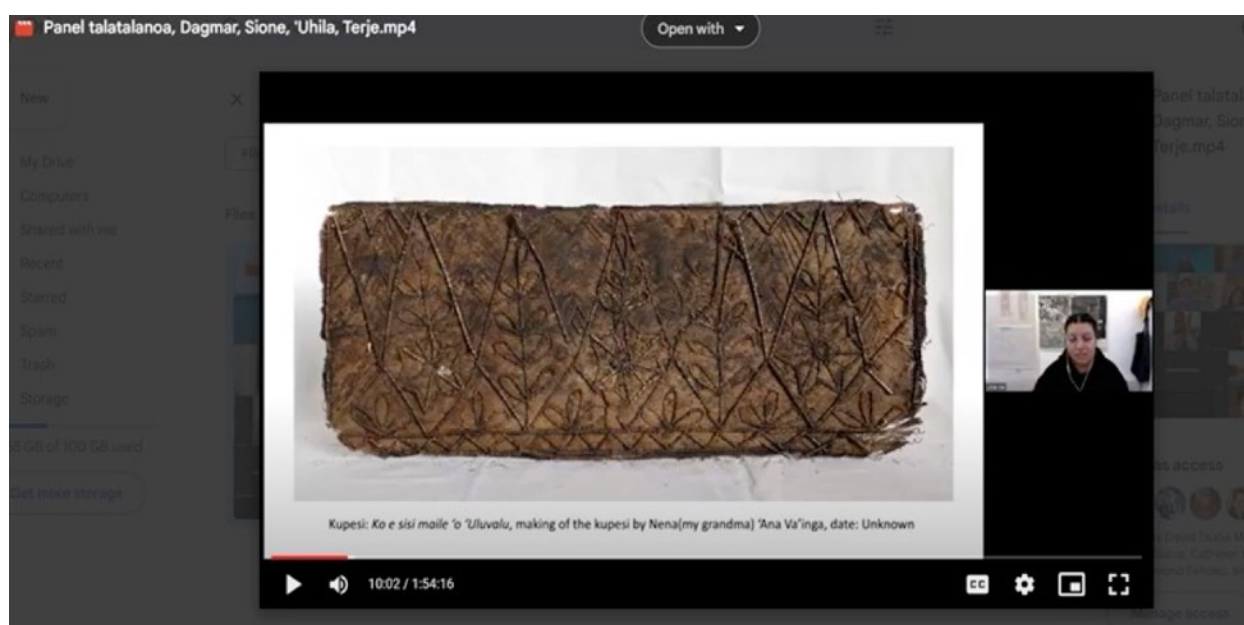
Tohi Kumi Koloa: The Land of each Lineage

‘Uhila Nai (Figure 5) is a Tongan New Zealand-born artist who emigrated to Tonga with her Nena (grandmother), ‘Ana Va’inga Pautā, in 1999. ‘Uhila Nai is from the village of Pelehake and genealogically connected to the village of Tatakamotonga, Fua‘amotu and the islands Foa and Nomuka. Her influence and inspiration come from watching her Nena making unique, traditional Tongan hand-made textiles. ‘Uhila Nai’s practice draws on the concepts of unfolding kupesi forms and learning about their individual characteristics (Nai, 2020), a practice that is founded on the idea of generating a new space that will allow her work to speak on its own terms, without having to fit with Western art frameworks. *Tohi Kumi Koloa* looks at her Nena’s kupesi collection as well as her own collection of kupesi forms (Nai, 2022). ‘Uhila Nai explains:

Understanding the craft of my ancestors is the core focus of my practice because it is a place I call home, and a reminder of paying respect to those who nourished knowledge, and placed so much wisdom into the creation of their design which I used in my practice.

Figure 5

‘Uhila Nai presenting ‘Tohi Kumi Koloa’



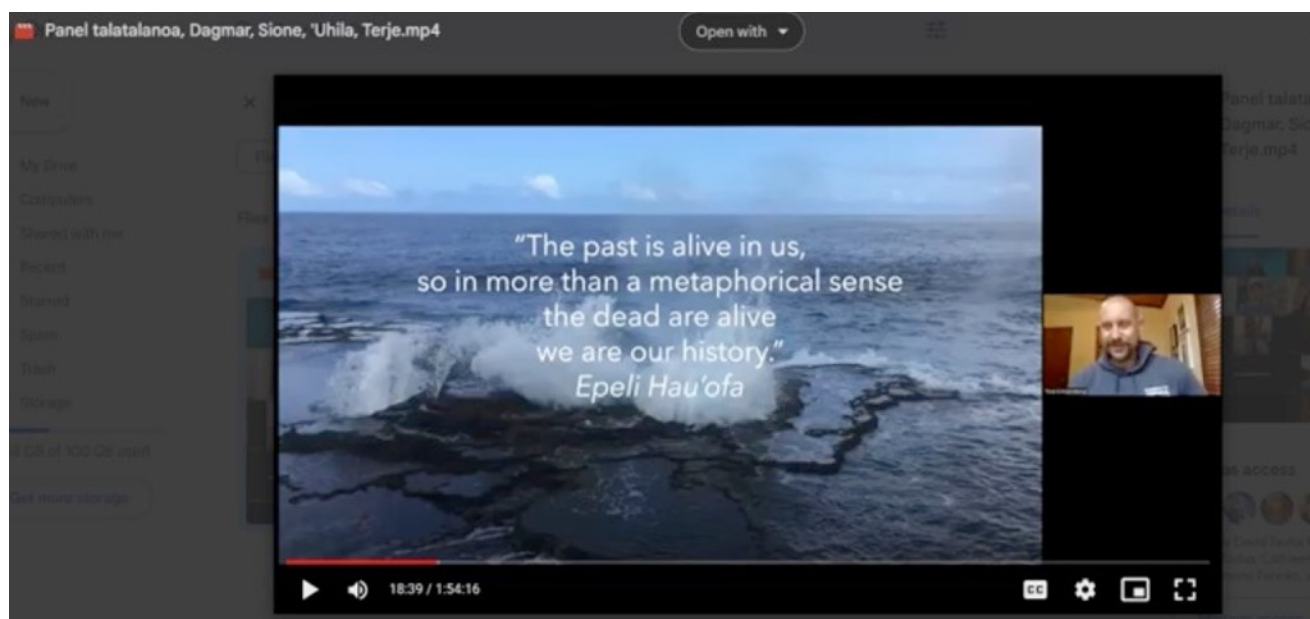
Note: Screenshot of Tongan-based artist ‘Uhila Nai presenting *Tohi Kumi Koloa* during the May 2022 talanoa session.

Ko e Anga ha o mau Fonua: It is the Way of our Land

Terje Koloamatangi (Figure 6) is a tufunga tātatau and is of Tongan and Norwegian Sami ancestry, born in Nuku'alofa Tongatapu with ancestral ties to Kolovai, Pangaimotu Vava'u and Åmøya, Northern Norway. He lives in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. His work is a form of reconnecting to fonua, across time and space, through the practice of tātatau (Koloamatangi, 2023). Terje Koloamatangi is an artist and cultural tattoo practitioner. "His work is centred on the revival of tātatau faka-Tonga (customary Tongan tattooing), a passion he has maintained for over 20 years. His practice is built on historical accounts, gleaned from texts, museum collections and Tongan oral traditions" (Koloamatangi, 2022, para. 1).

Figure 6

Terje Koloamatangi 'Ko e anga ha o mau fonua'



Note: Screenshot of New Zealand-based artist Terje Koloamatangi 'Ko e anga ha o mau fonua' during the May 2022 talanoa session.

Tongan Cultural Identity

Our cultural identities as Tongans help us to share ideas, discuss topics of interest, and connect at a level that is not common within Western academic contexts. As discussed previously, talatalanoa and introductions (Table 1) made at the start of sessions help us to make connections to one another. Fakafe'iloaki — the practice of introducing one's self to others in the online relational space (Figure 7) or building

narratives of Tongan lineage and familial or village connections — during talanoa helps to strengthen shared identity amongst TGSN members.

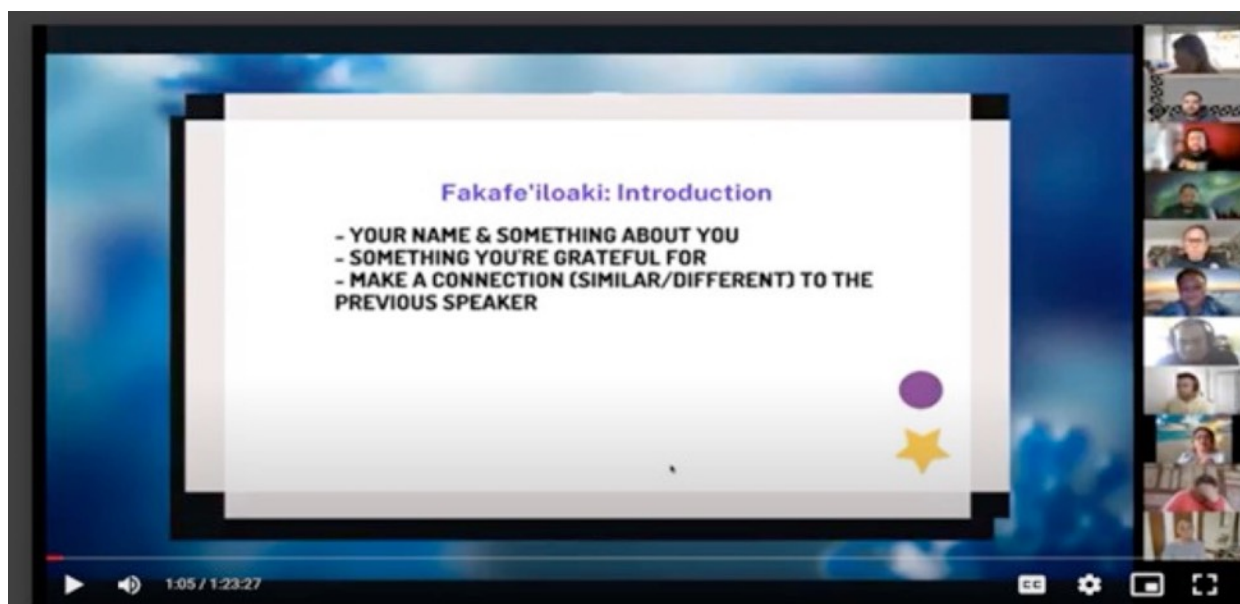
For instance, during our attendance (physical, face-to-face) at the Tongan Research Association (TRA) Conference in Tonga during July 2023, we further discovered that some of us were closely related or from the same villages and island groups. This further built *vā māfana* amongst our network members who were there, and the positive vibe continues to spread to others during our online talatalanoa. We tauhi *vā* (maintain and nurture these relationships) which helps to strengthen our Tongan identities, particularly for those of us based in tu'a Tonga. Other shared Tongan practices have been used to bring Tongans together, across tu'a Tonga and Tonga, as captured in the next creative piece by Edmond Fehoko:

Grounded in the fonua
 a plant and beverage of the Pacific
 fonua consumed
 enabling harmonious talanoa-*vā* and *mālie*

Grounded in the culture
 (re)searching cultural practices
 lost in translation
 across social spaces

Tama Tonga-Tonga!
 Ma'u leva ho'o kava
 accept your kava!
 Ho'o koloa ke fakamōnu – to laud our culture
 (Kava—Navigating fonua in New Fonua, Edmond Fehoko, 2021, as cited in Fa'avae et al., 2021)

As alluded to in his poem, Fehoko's online practices utilised kava (traditional plant used for ceremonial practices) and faikava (socio-cultural practice using the kava plant for consumption). It was a practice that brought together diverse generations across the United States, Australia, Tonga, and Aotearoa New Zealand. Central to such cultural practices is the opportunity to connect Tongans in the diaspora with Tongan cultural identity, as well as connections with the more-than-human world (i.e., fonua, moana, laumālie or spirituality), often referred to as the unknown.

Figure 7*Cultural fakafe'iloaki*

Note: Screenshot of the start of a talanoa session that happened in October 2021, whereby cultural fakafe'iloaki—introduction of selves to others—prepares the sociocultural vā—relational space.

According to Dagmar Dyck:

Creatives by nature are deeply thoughtful, and their means of language to communicate, express and provoke extends beyond words on a paper. The actual, literal hallmarks of penned research espoused by academia presents barriers to the innate ways of creatives' intellectualisation. Whereas our sense-making is manifested through the "making with our hands" the fixation of the written word can promote a stumbling block to the eloquence of nuanced works and methods of art making.

Dyck goes on to say:

Problem solving such a dilemma will require an earnest effort by co-conspirators in academic leadership to offer creatives scope and flexibility to afford their bodies of creative work genuine recognition. Academic conferences should ensure the presence of artists as part of the programme and provide a space for different modes of presenting beyond the traditional research expectations. Importantly, due to the often personal and vulnerable nature of creatives' art making, it is critical that guidelines of engagement are established to ensure

participants safety. Collaborations between academic researchers and artists offer a further solution to bringing forth artists' stories, theories, and ideologies. Creative disruption surrounding the notion of creatively critical research mirrors the essence of creativity where one can take a piece of knowledge that is part of them and resample that piece with something new to create a different outcome. It is this unending cycle of possibility that generates and fuels the potential of our artistic creatives.

Faleolo notes that:

Our connections are also to familiar places (and unfamiliar spaces), like our homelands in Tonga, or to diaspora spaces where our families have travelled and settled (Figure 8); these places and movements in-between spaces provide our network with shared geographies of emotions and connections to fonua—land, homelands, Tonga islands (Dening 2007; Teaiwa 2017).

Figure 8

Emeline Tu'imana-Unga's talanoa



Note: Screenshot of the middle of Emeline Tu'imana-Unga's talanoa in October 2021, when images of locations were shared as part of her presentation on Vātamaki- Vā on lockdown! *Veuveuki ke Ielei e Tauhivā.*

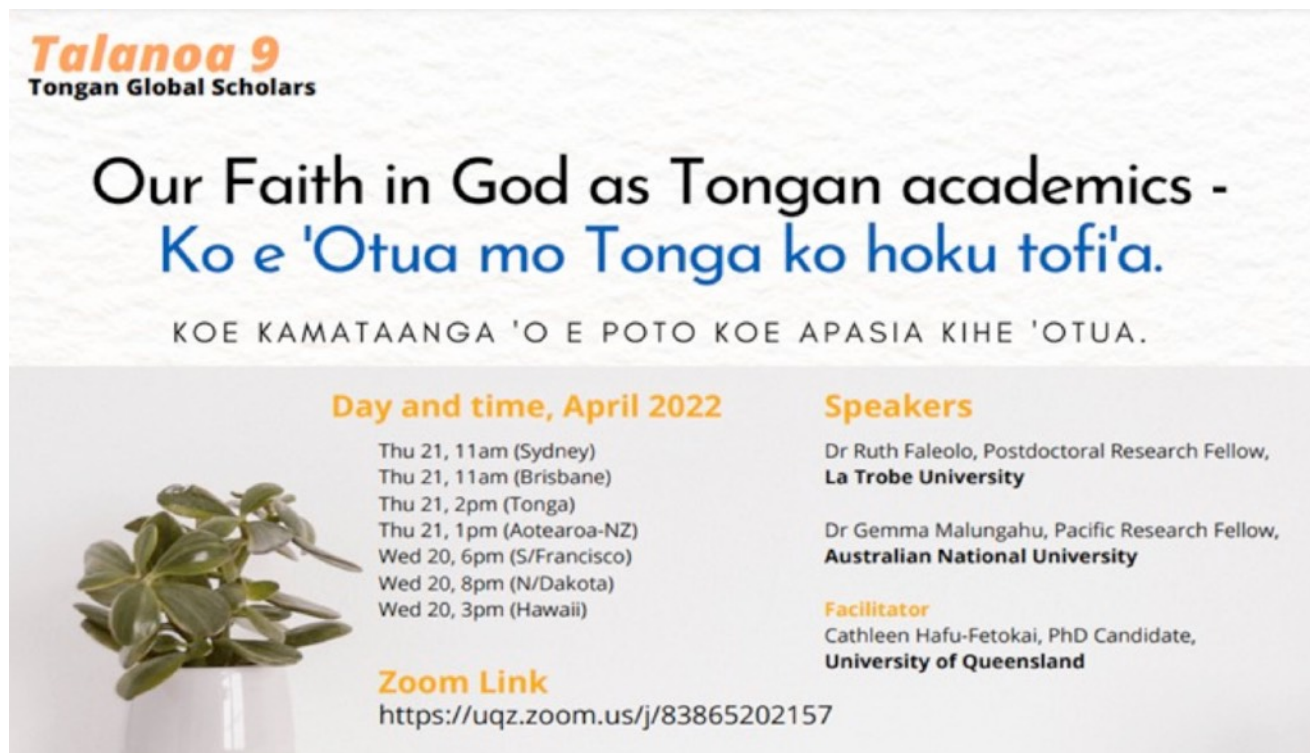
TGSN Critical Theory and Ongoing Talanoa

Spiritual Connections

A recurring statement amongst presenters during their talanoa and members of the network during talatalanoa, as well as on the bio statements sent in by members or speakers, is that their cultural lives as Tongans are intertwined with their faith in God. In one bio, a familiar statement was given: "Faith in God and Education' has been a family creed..."

An email sent out by Dr. David Fa'avae on 13 April 2022 and distributed to 60 TGSN members across seven time zones, attached a flyer promoting a talanoa session (Figure 9) hosted by members of the Australian executive team, a talatalanoa and talaloto shared by Dr. Ruth (Lute) Faleolo and Dr. Gemma Malungahu, facilitated by Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai. The title of this talanoa session: "Our faith in God as Tongan academics - Ko e 'Otua mo Tonga ko hoku tofi'a." As the Tongan part of this title states, "God and Tonga are my inheritance," we Tongans often acknowledge God and Tonga are inseparable. During this talanoa session, the phrase and meaning behind the phrase "Ko e kamataanga oe poto ko e 'apasia kihe 'Otua" (the beginning of wisdom is to fear God) was unpacked, and provided an opportunity for the TGSN members to share their experiences of enlightenment, and God's presence/guidance in their education/work/research. Despite the familiarity of the concepts of faith being synonymous with being a Tongan, admittedly, this topic was rarely shared in academic spaces outside of our Tongan church spaces, by Tongan scholars. So, this talanoa #9 was especially unique in that it was a first for many to hear the talk about God and our spirituality in an academic forum (Fainga'a-Manu Sione et al., 2024).

Figure 9
Promotional flyer



Note: Screenshot of a promotional flyer sent by Author G to all members of the TGSN (provided by the Australian executive team) in an email detailing the next online talanoa session.

Ancestral Connections

There is also a parallel discussion about the revival of understanding our spirituality, separate from the colonial structures brought to Tongan shores through European ships and missionaries (Figure 10). These discussions are founded on a Tongan identity that goes back to ancient times of knowing, beyond Westernised conceptions of church and religion.

Figure 10*Jione Havea's talanoa*

Note: Screenshot of the start of Jione Havea's talanoa in September 2021, when this image was shared as part of his presentation "Postcolonize now!" based on his 2017 book *Postcolonial Voices from Downunder*.

Several academics in the network promote a revived understanding that Tongans are connected to ancestors and to descendants across *tā* and *vā* (time and space) through our ancient belief systems. Some call for "resistance" to Western belief systems (Figure 11). Speakers like Dr. Jione Havea and Dr Tevita Ka'ili challenge mainstream notions of coloniality, disrupting how we choose to live and think in post-colonial times as Pacific academics. Havea (2017) states: "Now is the time to postcolonize. The invitation is serious. Lands, lives, liabilities, limits, longings, lore, and a whole lot more, remain unaccounted, unrecognized, uncompensated, unremitted. . . The invitation requires revisiting and rethinking the dreams and practices in and of Postcolonial Criticisms and Postcolonial Theologies" (p. 1).

Figure 11
Theological literature



Note: Screenshot of theological literature that challenges Western frameworks of Pacific people’s spirituality, promoted by Jione Havea in his talanoa session in September 2021.

The institutions that we teach in and belong to have promoted Westernized perceptions of us, and these talks encouraged us to unpack these Western frames and to review how we were thinking about our Tongan ways of being and knowing. TGSN’s responsibility is to provide a platform to engage in postcolonial and decolonial meaning-making using Tongan concepts, philosophies, and practices. Ka’ili’s presentation (Figure 12) argued that the “resurrection” of Tongan ‘otua (gods), particularly Hikule’o, Tangaloa, Maui, Hina, and others, will lead to new possibilities to address the current issues of climate change, political upheavals, social injustice, and future challenges arising.

Figure 12*Promotional flyer for talanoa session 7*

TONGAN GLOBAL SCHOLARS TALANOA No.7

**'Maui-TāVā-He-Akó,
Tēvita O. Ka'ili, PhD**

**Professor of Anthropology
and Cultural Sustainability,
Dean, Faculty of Culture,
Language, and Performing Arts,
Brigham Young University Hawaii**

[https://auckland.zoom.us/j/95566940481?
fbclid=IwAR0tmCTiXvdLpHxu1VQLEkvkpltoJPOMW-
8uueKtOvRjossJ3-VvkNzTuUk#success](https://auckland.zoom.us/j/95566940481?fbclid=IwAR0tmCTiXvdLpHxu1VQLEkvkpltoJPOMW-8uueKtOvRjossJ3-VvkNzTuUk#success)

Tonga
Tu'apulelulu, Nov 18 - 3pm

New Zealand
Thu, Nov 18 - 3pm

Australia
Thu, Nov 18 - 1pm, AEST (Syd, Canb, Melb)
Thu, Nov 18 - 12pm, AEST (Brisb)

United States
Wed, Nov 17 - 7pm, PST (California)
Wed, Nov 17 - 8pm, PST (Utah)
Wed, Nov 17 - 9pm, PST (N/Dakota)

"Resurrecting" Our Tongan 'Otua

Note: Screenshot of flyer distributed to promote talanoa session 7 with Dr. Tevita O. Ka'ili, in November 2021.

Ka'ili (2017) positions Indigeneity as a response to coloniality. He defines "... indigeneity to include ancient systems of thinking and behaving." (p. 5). In support of Ka'ili, Dyck (2021) states: "From a Pasifika perspective, funds of knowledge, including the arts, are enacted in our communities through cross-disciplinary and relational experiences, with indigenous creative knowledge holders being nested in our own family or community" (p. 6). Furthermore, in a paper written by Dyck et al. (2022), their conceptualisation of Mānava 'i he Loto Manava as a theoretical framework was to reconnect ancient knowledge and practice to highlight creatively critical Tongan sense-making in the global south. They claim:

Critical theory and theorising bring social contexts into closer observation and interrogation. . . Critical theory and theorising in Te Moana-nui-ā-kiwa/Oceania centres relationality in conceptualising and understanding change, shifts and transformation beyond the social realm and into spaces where abstract knowledge and critical thinking are intertwined and somewhat inseparable with other entities in the world—the fonua (land, placenta) and moana (ocean, Oceania). (p. 35)

Fa'avae's poem draws from both lea faka-Tonga (Tongan language) and lea faka-Pilitania (British English language):

Tangata 'o e moana | *people of the ocean*
 mānava 'i he loto manava | *breathing inside the womb*
 ue'i hotau loto | *ignite our hearts*
 ue'i hotau sino | *ignite our bodies*
 ue'i hotau laumālie | *ignite our spirits*
 mānava mei he loto manava | *breathing from within the womb*
 tauhi mo pukepuke e fonua | *caring for and maintaining people and place*
 (David Fa'avae, To ue'i | To ignite, 1:31 am)

As well, the Samoan theologian scholar Vaai (2017), represents his way of decolonising ideas of personhood, in his poem:

We don't *have* the spirit
 We *are* spirit
 We don't have land
 We *are* the land
 We don't have the ocean
 We *are* the ocean
 We don't have relationship
 We *are* relationship
 We don't have stories
 We *are* the story
 Rooted
 Connected
 Fixed yet fluid in bonds of
 Being in *Areness*
 Born from the depths
 Of *Inness*
 I am 'in' the community
 The community is
 'In' me
 I live
 Because
 We *are*
 A chorus of Inextricable relatedness...
 (Upolu Lumā Vaai, *We are because we don't have*, 2017, p. 283)

Sociocultural Connections

The spiritual connections and ancestral ties that are established online, manifest and are strengthened when members of the TGSN meet each other, for the first time, in person. Malungahu recalls when she physically met a fellow TGSN member in Australia, after more than two years of e-talanoa, in April 2023:

I remember when Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, presented in the *To Hell with Drowning Conference*, the annual Epeli Hau'ofa public lecture and postgraduate/ECR workshop delivered by Australian Association of Pacific Studies (AAPS) held in Canberra. We finally met at this event, in person for the first time. It was a coincidence that we had attended the conference together; it was unplanned. But, as the Tongan saying goes, “na'e hangē pe kuo na maheni fuoloa” (it's as if they were old friends) and this describes the bond and connection that we had through the TGSN; as if we had known each other for a long time!

This is a frequent nuance amongst TGSN members when meeting in person for the first time. Faleolo recalls a chance meeting in Aotearoa New Zealand with a fellow TGSN member, in June 2022:

I had made a quick trip to Aotearoa New Zealand in June 2022, for an examination of a doctoral thesis, and afterwards my colleague and I went to the AUT café, just off Queen Street for a debrief. While waiting for our meals, I heard a familiar voice booming down from the mezzanine floor just above us, “Ruth! Is that you?” I looked up and knew straight away it was Edmond Fehoko. He came down the stairwell and I went over to say hello; it was like I was meeting my younger brother, after a long time away. The familial vā that was evident that day had been long established, online, through our TGSN talatalanoa, since 2021. I felt blessed to meet my brother for the first time, on that trip!

Faleolo also recalls meeting fellow TGSN members during her transit flight to Tonga, via Fiji, and then finally at the TRA Conference, in July 2023:

We were queuing up to get on our plane, at the Suva International airport, when I turned to see another Tongan woman, smiling at me. She came over to me with arms wide open and embraced me, and right then I put a name to the smile—it was my Tongan sister Teli ('Esiteli), from Stanford. It was as if we had been hanging out forever, we were straight into conversation ‘Sis, how long was your flight from the States?’ I asked in mid-hug. ‘Oh my gosh sis! Too long! It was way too long!’ she replied. Seeing a familiar face from our TGSN while in an unfamiliar place, felt like I was already in Tonga. I was just excited to see the rest of the team, after bumping into Teli...and when we finally met up at the conference the next day, seeing the rest of the US team, our Tonga team, NZ team, and others from the Australia mob there, it was pure magic!

These positive experiences of TGSN members are evidence of sociocultural bonds and connections being strengthened through time and space, both virtually and in person. The impacts of the pandemic caused us to seek positive connections online, like the formation of TGSN. Furthermore, once travel and social restrictions ceased in late 2022, the opportunities to travel and connect face-to-face on-site meant extending our connectedness. We discuss this further, in the next section. Overall, our membership of a creative, critically minded, culturally responsive, globally situated, and interdisciplinary network has not only supported our academic progress, but our individual and collective well-being as Tongan scholars. We feel we belong to something that is both nourishing to us, and supporting us to progressively look to nourish others beyond ourselves.

An Opportunity to Collectively Share in Tonga

In July 2023, several members from TGSN (representing Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Tonga, and the United States teams), under the guidance of 'Esiteli Hafoka and Finausina Tovo, attended the 19th TRA Conference in Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu (Figure 13) to present a global panel talatalanoa titled "Ko e tauhi mo pukepuke fonua ma 'a hai?" (Who are we maintaining our Tongan language, culture, ways of knowing for?).

Figure 13

Finausina Tovo and 'Esiteli Hafoka



Note: TGSN executives Finausina Tovo and 'Esiteli Hafoka, acknowledged at the 19th TRA Conference, 5th July 2023. Photo provided by Ruth (Lute) Faleolo.

Johansson-Fua (2007) urged us to be responsible Tongan researchers and practitioners, both in Ioto Tonga (islands of Tonga) and tu'a Tonga (outside of Tonga, or

diaspora contexts). Considering this challenge put to us by Johansson-Fua, the TGSN panellists attended this gathering to collectively share our diverse experiences, from both tu'a Tonga and Ioto Tonga. We were able to present to an audience made up of Tongan elders, parents/caregivers, community leaders, educators, researchers, practitioners, and Tonga-based high school students. Our panel presentation of narratives addressed important questions about the pursuit of a doctoral degree, or obtaining an academic career or profession afterwards. We spoke about the balance of living as a Tongan scholar in a diaspora context, whilst maintaining *anga faka-Tonga* and a Tongan identity.

TGSN members also spoke of the opportunity that exists in the network to build capacity, and to successfully engage in early or mid-career research and practice, with support from the network. Our attendance at the conference, as a collective, was an opportunity to increase the reach of our support to graduate level students and practitioners alike who were interested in pursuing a PhD or academic career, in Ioto Tonga and tu'a Tonga. TGSN brought to the fore a de-mystifying of the career pathway trajectory following from a master's degree, into doctoral studies, and beyond; something that is often kept out of reach by gate keepers in universities. Delivering such messages as Tongans, in Tonga, for our next generation of scholars was an important duty and opportunity for us; we were addressing our objectives and meeting our vision as a network. If we continue to work together, towards these goals, we will achieve success as Tongans, for Tongans, by Tongans.

Faka'osi—Closing Thoughts: Tongan Journeys of Academic Success

The overall agenda and desire behind the creation of the network, and our support for one another through the journey of academia—across the globe in our multi-sited contexts—is that we might discover more meaning and success as Tongan academics. We often discuss what success looks like for us as Tongans and as academics, and these threads of *talanoa*, of our sense-making and meaning-making, are at the core of our activities.

In crafting our conversations and learnings through e-*talanoa* about our online engagements as a global space of creative criticality, the intergenerational rhythms were captured using various modalities—words and narratives, images, screenshots, and poetry. These ways of expressing Tongan concepts, knowledge, and approaches epitomise the various ways in which Tongan scholars communicate their creatively critical dialogue and meaning-making in the diaspora of Australia, United States, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Tonga. Intergenerational collaborative meaning-making

matters, and the Tongan Global Scholars (TGSN) group continues to prioritise the shared cultivation of such understanding of Tongan ideas, knowledge, and language across diverse spaces and contexts.

Appendix: Vision Statement and Goals

Tongan Global Scholars Network (TGSN)

Vision (vision)

Fakakoloa ‘a e to‘utangata Tonga: To connect, inspire, empower, and nurture Tongan emergent researchers, scholars, and educators across the globe.

Mission

1. To connect and nurture emergent Tongan researchers, scholars, and educators in Australia, United States, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Tonga.
2. To ground, articulate, and critique Tongan research methodologies, methods, approaches, frameworks, and concepts through creative (ongomālie) and critically meaningful (‘uhingamālie) modes of interpretation, expression, and meaning-making.
3. To inspire and empower creatively critical and community-centred Tongan thought and change leaders and leadership practice.
4. To nurture intergenerational mentoring and learning between emergent and more experienced researchers, scholars, and educators.

Spiritual energies and sources

fakakoloa (to share, to reciprocate), mālie (enliven, uplift), māfana (heart-work, empathy)

Values

Loto fiefoaki (generous spirit)

Loto ‘ofa (spirit of love, care, and kindness)

Loto toka‘i (deep respect)

Loto tō (humility)

Purpose of Online Talatalanoa Sessions

The Tongan Global Scholars Network’s online talatalanoa sessions seek to bring together emergent Tongan scholars across various places and spaces. To appreciate each individual’s diverse level of exposure and engagement with Lea faka-Tonga and Tongan knowledges and practices in Australia, United States, Aotearoa New Zealand,

and Tonga, we embrace such specificities and actively choose to learn and grow as a community.

Guided by the spiritual and generative energies of fakakoloa (to share, to reciprocate), mālie (enliven, uplift), and māfana (heart-work, empathetic), our engagement across communicative and technological platforms provides opportunities to extend Tongan-centred research methodologies, methods, approaches, frameworks, and concepts in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary ways. Appreciating and respecting the collective collaboration within the Tongan Global Scholars Network, individuals are expected to utilise the values of loto fiefoaki (generous spirit), loto 'ofa (spirit of love, care, and kindness), loto toka'i (deep respect), and loto tō (humility).

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We acknowledge our mentors and Tongan knowledge holders. For most of us these are our parents, grandparents, family scholars and creatives, including community elders. These knowledge holders, creatives, scholars, and experts have made necessary sacrifices, endured lonely roads, overcoming challenges to pave the way ahead for us as today's emerging Tongan scholars. We will be forever grateful. In honouring them, we will also make a way ahead for the next generation, by continuing the work begun, to share and maintain, as well as co-create knowledge and understandings – to pukepuke fonua.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Vahaope is a compound term meaning the space between islands ('vaha') that extends outside or beyond the borders or range of an area ('ope'). Fehoko et al. (2021) and Henry and Aparosa (2021) use this term in various contexts of Oceanic living and meaning making.
- ² Vā is a Tongan term for sociocultural or relational spaces. Vā-relations is based on the understanding that 'vā shapes the interconnections between people–people, people–ideas, place–people, temporal–spiritual, seen–unseen' (Fa'avae et al. 2022, p. 394).
- ³ Talanoa is a Tongan term that can be used as both a noun (story, dialogue) or verb (to talk, talking, storying). In the context of the TGSN, talanoa is used to refer to the online meetings and talking sessions hosted by the executive teams, often with a panel of speakers that will present and then create topics of discussion for that 'talanoa' session. Critical talanoa refers to the way that members have ongoing, creative, and critical dialogue in response to presented research and practice, by speakers, during each talanoa session.
- ⁴ Faka-famili is a term used in Tongan households to mean 'family gathering'—a traditional familial practice scheduled to happen in the family home on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. See Fainga'a-Manu Sione et al. (in press, in this Special Issue) who mentions the practice of faka-famili (Ruth's talaloto). Also, see Faleolo (2020, p.192, p. 216).
- ⁵ Kupesi is a Tongan term meaning patterns or template of designs that can be duplicated. Kupesi is commonly associated with the tapa-cloth making process, whereby patterns are created and duplicated across several units of barkcloth, according to the preferred design.
- ⁶ See Fale-ship: Sione Faletau – Creative Process YouTube clip, posted by Tautai Arts, 1 November 2021 <https://youtu.be/lldvM4r3HbQ?si=pEP9i5t7RCpIIDhv>