

# THE PACIFIC RESEARCH PARADIGM

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## Opportunities and challenges

*Eseta Tualualelei\**

*Judy McFall-McCaffery†*

### Abstract

Around the world, favourable social and political circumstances have encouraged the development of academically non-traditional ways of researching. This article explores the recent proliferation of research approaches from Pacific and Pasifika communities which, in some Australian and New Zealand contexts, are attracting increased interest from policymakers and researchers. We present a socio-historical account of how the Pacific research paradigm emerged and some key contemporary Pacific research approaches within this paradigm. We then critique aspects of the paradigm's development by discussing opportunities and challenges. Our main argument is for researcher reflexivity and dialogue, important for the development and sustainability of research inspired by Pacific ways of knowing and being. We believe this will lead to research in which Pacific communities will recognise themselves and their aspirations for the future.

### Keywords

Pacific Island, Pasifika, Oceania, research paradigm,  
research approaches, Indigenous knowledge

\* Lecturer, School of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Springfield, Queensland, Australia.  
Email: Eseta.Tualualelei@usq.edu.au

† Pacific Academic Engagement Advisor, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.

## Introduction

In recent decades, the encouragement of methodological and philosophical pluralism has promoted research approaches that are responsive to previously marginalised voices. For those working from and with Pacific Island or Pasifika communities, this has led to a profusion of research approaches and methodologies such that researchers can now choose between using Pacific-Indigenous research approaches, non-Indigenous research approaches, Pacific-inspired approaches or a blend of various approaches. In New Zealand and Australia, Pasifika are people or descendants of people originally from islands in the Pacific Ocean (McGavin, 2014; Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Samu, 2010; Suaalii-Sauni, 2008). This article uses the term “Pacific” to refer to Pacific Islander peoples residing in and outside the Pacific Islands, including Pasifika peoples. While the availability of choice is advantageous for researchers, the rapid proliferation of research approaches has prompted concerns about their theoretical underpinnings, critical grounding, and value for research and social transformation (Burnett, 2012; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017; Tunufa’i, 2016). There is also a concern that emerging and non-Pacific researchers may find the ever-increasing array of methodologies, concepts and discourses confusing or inaccessible (Efi, 2005; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017). Addressing these concerns is significant for the sustainability and impact of this burgeoning research paradigm.

To respond to these concerns, this article continues the dialogue advocated by Sanga and Reynolds (2017) about how the Pacific research paradigm is developing. Co-authored by an Australian-based researcher and an Aotearoa New Zealand-based Pacific researcher, the article begins by outlining how the contemporary Pacific research paradigm emerged, particularly within the social sciences. The next section presents an overview of contemporary Pacific research approaches, highlighting the rich array

found in academic literature. The subsequent discussion examines some of the opportunities that are presented through venturing into inquiry with new and renewed tools of inquiry. The discussion also presents some challenges that need to be addressed in order to move the Pacific theoretical project forward while managing potential issues such as paradigm dominance and the like (see Denzin, 2017). We argue here that Pacific theory-building can be strengthened through reflexivity and balanced critical dialogue. The discussion concludes with some implications for future research, supporting calls for further dialogue.

## The emergence of a Pacific research paradigm

A paradigm is a way of seeing the world and organising knowledge, and the term as it is used in this article derives from the work of Kuhn (1970). Kuhn (1970) was a natural science history lecturer who, after spending a year with social scientists and noticing the intense disagreements they had “about the nature of legitimate problems and methods” (p. viii), began to explore the idea that these were caused by competing paradigms. He defined a “paradigm” as “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by members of a given community” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175). It can be understood as a lens which orders how researchers see the world while also limiting what they see. Kuhn argued that when a paradigm no longer accounts for the way information is being perceived, a “paradigm shift” occurs, and the community of researchers must adjust and reorient their perceptive lenses. What is considered a legitimate problem or a topic worth researching becomes redefined, and along with that, new or revised approaches to inquiry evolve.

Kuhn’s notion of paradigmatic shift accurately captures how the Pacific research paradigm emerged. Indigenous people have

always had ways of creating knowledge and understanding their realities, but these ways have struggled to gain recognition in the academy. Several decades ago, only a handful of pioneering scholars were promoting the value of Indigenous and Pacific knowledges in higher education (McFall-McCaffery, 2010). For instance, G. Smith developed Kaupapa Māori in 1997, challenging the dominant deficit theories that harmed rather than helped Māori communities in New Zealand (G. Smith, Hoskins, & Jones, 2012). Other scholars created Indigenous places of higher learning, such as Futa Helu's founding of the 'Atenisi Institute in Tonga in 1963 (Helu, 1999), and Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa's establishment in 1997 of Le Iunivesite o le Amosa o Savavau, Samoa's only Indigenous tertiary education institute. These and other Pacific visionary scholars—including Teresia Teaiwa (2001), David Gegeo (2001; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001), Konai Helu Thaman (1992, 1993, 1994, 2003), Manulani Meyer (1998, 2001, 2003) and Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi (2003, 2005, 2007), among others—advocated for Indigenous knowledges against a backdrop of broader discourses concerning postcolonialism and self-determination. Their efforts garnered mixed reactions from local populations (Coxon, 2010) and an initially muted reception in wider academia, but these pioneering figures and their work embodied the collective and colonially rejected desires and oral knowledges of Pacific communities.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, which affirmed the rights of Indigenous people to their own culture, traditions and language (art. 31), bolstered the work of Indigenous knowledge advocates. Because Māori and Pacific scholars had persisted with their projects, their passions and struggles spilled over into transnational and diasporic communities where movements for more culturally relevant and culturally appropriate research had gained momentum. Pasifika populations had steadily grown in New Zealand, Australia and the United States

of America, and their challenges were becoming acute. These challenges included increases in Pasifika youth delinquency (Borrero, Yeh, Tito, & Luavasa, 2010; Yeh, Borrero, Tito, & Petaia, 2014) and incarceration (Shepherd & Ilalio, 2016), disproportionate representation of Pasifika with serious health issues (Hawley & McGarvey, 2015), and concerns about the academic achievements of Pasifika students (Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2002; Ferguson, Gorinski, Samu, & Mara, 2008). In New Zealand, more authorities and academic institutions installed guidelines for Pasifika-related services, engagement and research (i.e., Airini et al., 2010; Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001; Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2014; University of Otago, 2011), and the numbers of Pasifika students enrolled in postgraduate research gradually increased (Tertiary Education Commission, 2017; Theodore et al., 2018). In these circumstances, Pacific- and Pasifika-specific approaches to academic inquiry emerged, some building on the work of the scholars mentioned above, and others completely new in conceptualisation.

### The contemporary Pacific research paradigm

Pacific research approaches are currently flourishing, as evidenced by the availability of published and unpublished studies. Published work using Pacific research approaches can be found mainly in the fields of education (e.g., Anae, 2010; Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016), mental health and health (e.g., Kupa, 2009; Seiuli, 2010; Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, & Bush, 2005) and social work (e.g., Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Ravulo, 2016). There has also been a significant increase in unpublished work using Pacific research approaches, such as for master's and doctoral level theses (e.g., Latu, 2009; Te Ava, 2011). Burnett (2012) highlighted the importance of these postgraduate outputs "because

they represent the Pacific education theories that will later flow back into Pacific communities” (p. 482) and because of the potential for transformative change in the researcher’s thinking about education and research. Furthermore, most of the postgraduate scholars producing this work are the progeny of more established academics (Burnett, 2012), which enhances the legitimacy, continued utilisation and development of the Pacific research paradigm in mainstream academia.

To demonstrate the breadth of current work, key Pacific and Pasifika research approaches (encompassing metaphors, models, frameworks, methods and methodologies) are summarised in Table 1. The table organises key contemporary approaches alphabetically with original authors listed first. The table is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Data were sourced from a range of key academic databases (JSTOR, Web of Science, ProQuest, Scopus, Trove and nzresearch.org.nz) by using combinations of the search terms “Pacific”, “Pasifika”, “research”, “approach”, “model”, “method”, “framework” and “methodology”. We excluded research approaches that are Māori or Hawaiian, peoples originally Pacific in heritage but usually named in the literature as Indigenous. The results turned up more Polynesian Pacific research approaches than Melanesian and Micronesian. A full explanation of each research approach is outside the scope of this article, so the reader is encouraged to access the primary sources listed in the table. Table 1 is intended to provide an entry point for emerging and non-Pacific researchers into this rapidly expanding area, as well as serve as a reference point for the ensuing discussion.

Table 1 samples the broad range of available Pacific and Pasifika research approaches. The Pacific groups of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa are represented by multiple research approaches, as are many smaller Pacific communities. The research approaches collated in Table 1 are exclusively qualitative, and although we are not aware of examples of purely quantitative

Pacific or Pasifika research approaches, mixed-methods research is evident (Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Si’ilata, 2014). Nomenclature draws heavily from Pacific Island languages and the metaphors are also distinctly Pacific. For example, the Samoan *fale* features in *Fa’afaletui*, *Fonofale* and *Uputaua*, and various canoes feature in *Vaka*, *Kupa* and *Va’a tele*. In addition, several research approaches in Table 1 reference common Pacific values, including a holistic or spiritual worldview that appears to validate non-sensory, religious and supernatural phenomena (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Meyer, 1998; Wood, 2006). These commonalities highlight that Pacific and Pasifika communities share semiotic and representational perspectives rooted in Pacific realities.

Table 1 further suggests areas for exploration. Certain research approaches appear to be context-specific, such as *Teu le vā*, primarily for educational research, and *Fonua*, for health research, yet both emphasise the importance of relationships for collaboration. The extent to which these could be used outside their original contexts is not clear from the literature. The use of metaphors is also significant because research is likened to a variety of cultural activities: weaving in *Fa’afaletui*, quilting in *Tivaevae*, and garland-making in *Kakala* and *Ula*. The strength of these metaphors relies on their cultural contexts (Johansson Fua, Sanga, Walker, & Ralph, 2011; Ruru, Sanga, Walker, & Ralph, 2013; Sanga, 2013), which researchers may not fully appreciate (McFall-McCaffery, 2017). A further area for exploration is the idea of “relational space” expressed in Tongan and Samoan as “*vā*”. Is *vā* a pan-Pacific concept? How does *vā* apply to the range of relationships between peoples in different Pacific and non-Pacific settings? Again, Pacific cultural knowledge and experience is crucial to exploring these ideas (Amituanai-Toloa, 2009).

Hence, some recent critiques about the development of the Pacific research paradigm point to theoretical concerns, highlighting the local versus the general application of research (Naepi,

TABLE 1 Key contemporary Pacific research approaches

Name	Authors	Fields	Origin	Key ideas	Metaphor/Concepts
Fa'afaletui	Tamasese, Peteru, and Waldegrave (1997); Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, and Bush (2005); McCarthy, Shaban, and Stone (2011)	Mental health, Health	Samoa	Communal knowledge creation through consensus; weaving knowledge together through grouping and regrouping	Fale (Samoan house), tui (weaving)
Fonofale	Pulotu-Endemann (2009)	Health	Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Niue, Tokelau	Holistic understanding of health incorporating culture, family, the physical, spiritual, mental and other dimensions of health, as well as time, context and environment	Fale with roof, foundation and pou (posts)
Fonua	Tu'itahi (2009)	Health	Tonga	Holistic wellbeing and health of individuals, communities and environments and the relationships between them	Land
'Iluvatu	Naisilisili (2012)	Education, community research	Fiji	Research guided by values of inclusiveness, respect, the family, cohesiveness, uniqueness, reflections, reciprocity and spirituality; derivative of Vanua (see further down the table)	'Iluvatu (special Cu'u mat)
Kakala	Thaman (1992, 1993); Manu'atu (2000); Johansson Fua, Manu, Takapautolo, and Taufe'ulungaki (2007); Johansson Fua (2009, 2010)	Education, Project Management	Tonga	Philosophy for teaching, learning and research acknowledging social relationships: teu (plan), toli (gather), tui (weave), luva (present), malie (feedback/evaluation) and mafana (impact/sustainability)	Tui kakala (garland-making)

Name	Authors	Fields	Origin	Key ideas	Metaphor/Concepts
Kapasa and Yavu	Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2017, 2018)	Policy development and community engagement	Tonga, Fiji	Strengths-based approaches encouraging inclusive and mutually beneficial relationships and authentic collaborations	Kapasa (compass); yavu (roots)
Mana Moana	Mila (2017)	Leadership, Wellbeing and Mental health	Tonga, Polynesian Pacific	Indigenous wellbeing approach and intervention based on shared Pacific generative words and concepts	Mana (ancestral/spiritual/cultural essence or power)
Mea-alofa	Seiuli (2010)	Mental Health, Counselling	Samoa	Healing as an interpersonal and relational practice	Mea (thing), alofa (love); gifting
Ta Vā	Mahina (2010)	Art, Anthropology, General research	Tonga	Theory of reality and knowledge where time and space are symmetrical in form, interconnected and harmonious; emphasises social relations	Ta (time), vā (space)
Talanoa	Vaioleti (2006, 2011); Prescott and Hooper (2009); Prescott (2011)	Education	Tonga	Researching through conversation; engagement of diverse and contesting stories	Talanoa (conversations)
Tanoa ni veiqaravi	Ravulo (2018)	Social work	Fiji	Service through talanoa (shared stories), collective identity, reciprocity and egalitarianism	Tanoa (kava bowl); serving others
Tauhi vā	Ka'ili (2005)	General research	Tonga	Nurturing sociospatial ties through geographical and genealogical connections	Reciprocity, relational spaces
Te Vaka Atafaga	Kupa (2009)	Mental Health	Tokelau	Total wellbeing of te tino o te tangata (physical body), mafaufau (mind), kaiga (families), tapuakiga/talitonuga (spirituality/beliefs), fenua (environment), inati (social sharing)	Paopao (outrigger canoe)

(continued)

Name	Authors	Fields	Origin	Key ideas	Metaphor/Concepts
Teu le vā	Anae (2010, 2016)	Education	Samoa	Practices to engage stakeholders, collaborate, coordinate, accumulate knowledge, understand different kinds of knowledge, engage with knowledge brokers	Reciprocal relationships
Tivaevae	Inspired by Maua-Hodges (1999) and developed by Te Ava (2011); Te Ava and Page (2018); Te Ava and Rubie-Davies (2011); Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges (2019)	Education, Health, Indigenous Knowledge and Language/s	Cook Islands	Centrality of culture, collaboration, respect, reciprocity, relationships, and shared vision in research	Tivaevae or tivaivai (Cook Islands patchwork quilt)
Tofā'anolasi	Galuvao (2016)	Education	Samoa	Critical discourse analysis from a Samoan perspective	Wisdom to identify/critique the meanings of texts
Tree of Opportunity	Pene, Taufe'ulungaki, and Benson (2002)	Education	Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Niue, Hawai'i, Cook Islands, Tonga	Vision for Pacific education deeply rooted in Pacific cultures, languages, values, worldviews and knowledge	Tree
Ula	Sauni (2011)	Education (Early Childhood)	Samoa	Research approach based on the principles and values of fa'asamoa (Samoan culture)	Lei (garland)
Uputaua	Seiuli (2012)	Health, Psychology	Samoa	12 key features including spirituality, culture/customs, family, vā (relationality), physical wellbeing and others	Faletalimalo (Samoan meeting house); Uputaua (sacred conversations)

Name	Authors	Fields	Origin	Key ideas	Metaphor/Concepts
Vā	Indigenous Pacific concept; interpreted by Wendt (1999); Tuagalu (2008); Reynolds (2016); Amituanai-Toloa (2018, April 29) and others	Education	Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Hawaii	Emphasises the spiritual and social connections between people, contexts and environments; focuses on intentions and purposeful actions within social spaces; Vā is a key dimension of Ta Vā, Tauhi Vā and Teu le Vā (also in this table)	Vā (relational spaces)
Va'a Tele	Si'ilata (2014)	Education	Samoa	Evidence-based strategies for bilingual/bicultural Pasifika learners' success in English-medium schools and classes	Va'a tele (double-hulled deep-sea canoe)
Vaka	Nelisi (2004)	Education	Niue	Significance of Indigenous values, knowledge and approaches Pacific teachers bring to their pedagogy	Canoe
Vanua	Nabobo-Baba (2008)	Education	Fiji	Processes and protocols used when researching Indigenous Fijian histories, knowledges, skills, arts, values and lifeways	Land



2015). Sanga and Reynolds (2017) argued for the importance of locating current developments within their particular socio-historic context, especially through explicit acknowledgement of genealogical relationships between research methodologies. Respectful and careful critique of Pacific research approaches is necessary for their development, and the authors caution of “model-making as a self-justifying activity” (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 201). A more pointed critique is presented by Tunufa’i (2016), who claims that Talanoa does not have status as a research methodology, in part, because it lacks a clear philosophical rationale (contrasting with Tecun, Hafoka, ‘Ulu‘ave, & ‘Ulu‘ave-Hafoka, 2018). Furthermore, in a survey of New Zealand postgraduate research in Pacific education conducted between 1944 and 2008, Burnett (2012) found that very little emancipatory and deconstructivist research had been completed, leading to questions about whether the social transformative potential of Pacific postgraduate studies had been realised. These critiques suggest that Pacific research approaches need firm theoretical foundations to align with their stated purposes and goals.

Other critiques are directed at Pacific research practices. Several of the approaches in Table 1 are comprehensive in outlining principles, but not practices and methods. The most widely used research approach, Talanoa, is a case in point. Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014) expressed concern that Talanoa was being replaced by informal interviews or chatting outside Indigenous cultural contexts. Similarly, Fa’avae, Jones and Manu’atu (2016) questioned whether Talanoa was a mere data collection tool, noting very different philosophical, local and cultural systems behind various forms of Talanoa, and they described difficulties in reporting Talanoa in research. This indicates the need for clearer practical guidelines as well as theoretical refinement.

One assumption underlying these critiques is that researchers using Pacific research approaches have an overview of the field

and can locate their work within it. Another assumption is that Pacific research approaches are explicit about the necessary theoretical and conceptual connections that are central to their use and interpretation. These assumptions make a case for greater clarity and coherence in the field to increase accessibility to novice and non-Pacific researchers, to facilitate the theorisation of Pacific research approaches and to help researchers make informed selections to suit their research purposes and values. To contribute to coherence in the field, the next section discusses some key opportunities and challenges presented by theory-building in Pacific and Pasifika research.

### Opportunities and challenges

To be clear, we reiterate that Pacific knowledge-seeking and knowledge creation are not limited to the academy. Indeed, Indigenous Pacific knowledge is being used and created every day in villages across the Pacific, in churches, governing institutions and wherever Pacific peoples interact (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). This article, however, is concerned with the ways in which these Pacific knowledges are being explored, developed and shared further through writing or publication. These written records are how new researchers across time and place are making and will make sense of the Pacific research paradigm. If a cross-Pacific umbrella research paradigm has emerged from the multitude of approaches and methodologies (Sanga, 2004; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017), how are Pasifika scholars shaping this paradigm?

To date, Pacific scholars have forged a path of unique opportunities that come with exploring new and renewed approaches to inquiry. Pacific researchers have been able to move out of the epistemological borderlands (Harding, 1996) and apply novel (to the academy) ways of investigating and problem-solving to contemporary challenges (Reynolds, 2016). The opportunities to explore and practise culture

and language in new contexts has, in turn, led to more conversations about Pacific philosophical thought in research. Naming concepts and ideas has encouraged translanguaging, bringing attention to the richness and depth of Pacific languages while at the same time challenging the primacy of English terminology and concepts. Working across languages and cultures forces clarity of expression in articulating our approaches, so that they make sense to ourselves, our communities and others.

Perhaps a key opportunity relates to the humanisation of research; Pacific research approaches promote inquiry that is more authentic, respectful and meaningful to Pacific communities. Some Pacific researchers have introduced or *reintroduced* an element to knowledge creation that makes some people feel uncomfortable (Watson-Gegeo, 2004)—that which the modern scientific world long ago rejected as being “unscientific”: knowledge based on a reality beyond what can be experienced through our objective bodies and our conscious subjectivities. Thus, research may now be conducted in ways that reclaim and acknowledge the full spectrum of human experience as perceived by Pacific peoples but which has been treated for so long as simply folk knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This includes what Paulo Freire (2000) called “love”, and acts of love, he wrote, affirm people’s humanity (p. 50). In some Pacific cultures, these acts of love occur in the relational space, in the *vā*, and it is a constant reminder that we are all connected to each other and to our ecosystems (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Our future existence depends upon those relationships being harmonious.

A challenge to maintaining harmony in research involves overcoming predefined categorisations and binaries. The acts of creating, naming and categorising research approaches that push past inherited boundaries represent a formidable social power (Bourdieu, 1985). While researchers should boldly “trouble tidy binaries” (Lather, 2006, p. 36) received from

previous generations of researchers, we also need to problematise newly created constructs or old ones that no longer apply in the same ways. Burnett (2012) provided the example that knowledge and knowledge-making in Pacific research approaches are often framed as “Pacific and West, colonized and colonizer, inside and outside” (p. 488). Yet globalisation, technology and an increase in social conscientiousness has encouraged shifting, overlapping and hybrid identities, languages and cultures. To research contemporary contexts is to welcome multiple perspectives of knowledge and to acknowledge that no one approach, even within the Pacific research paradigm, has the monopoly on truth and knowledge.

This leads to a related challenge regarding discourse and critique. Pacific research approaches should be scrutinised to facilitate development, and thus, several commentators have pointed to the need for respectful and constructive critique (e.g., Burnett, 2012; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017). However, challenging received knowledge in Pacific cultures can clash with notions of respect, relationality, humbleness and deference. The social and political hierarchies of Pacific communities, complicated by the ongoing effects of the colonial era and new hierarchies of the neoliberal era, can make researchers reticent in their critiques. This may result in the encroachment of a type of intellectual neocolonialism whereby stronger research voices drown out less numerous (but no less authentic) voices. This, in turn, might effectively silence already marginalised Pacific individuals and groups, particularly if the power of Pacific research approaches is wielded by institutions or governments to justify decisions not agreed to by Pacific peoples. Furthermore, increasingly sophisticated and complex terminology and rhetoric risks relegating Pacific research approaches to the domain of the academic elite (Burnett, 2007) and removing them further and further from the communities they should serve, from where the newer generations of Pacific researchers will emerge.

A further challenge relates to the appropriation of aspects of culture and language. Table 1 includes metaphors of Samoan houses, canoe voyages, making garlands and quilting, which as already mentioned, may or may not be useful frames of reference for researchers who have no or limited lived experience of them (McFall-McCaffery, 2017). Relatedly, there is the question of the limitations of linguistic representation and the extent to which English, which has emerged as the default cross-Pacific language, can be used to represent all Pacific knowledge. As L. T. Smith (2012) asserted, “There are realities which can only be found, as self-evident concepts, in the indigenous language; they can never be captured by another language” (p. 159), but there is no single Pacific language that can express all the nuances of our various cultures. What are the implications then of linguistic and cultural competence for Pacific research approaches? What are the implications of relying on English, and not Pacific languages, as the lingua franca for disseminating research? Critical reflection on these points may enhance researcher reflexivity and reduce “clutter” (Efi, 2005).

A final challenge is that in articulating contemporary Pacific research approaches, researchers might reach back into an idealised past that some argue never really existed (e.g., Fitzsimons & Smith, 2000; Keesing, 1989; Kristeva, 1993). Pacific cultures, like all cultures, are fluid, ambiguous and ever evolving. Knowledge politics are part of our heritage. In many Pacific societies, a select number of people in a family group were entrusted with genealogical histories or knowledge that was intimately related to power. Hau’ofa (1994) exemplified this in his description of an era when the aristocratic class controlled knowledge. He wrote, “Keeping the ordinary folk in the dark and calling them ignorant made it easier to control and subordinate them” (Hau’ofa, 1994, p. 149). This manifests in contemporary Pacific and Pasifika communities where “ordinary folk” may respect the voices of authority and

refrain from criticising their ideas and actions (Coxon, 2010; Twyford, 1988). Thus, as Pacific researchers, we need to recognise the underlying power structures of our own communities and institutions and the impact they have on the pursuit of knowledge.

### Future implications

Sanga and Reynolds (2017) argued for “intentional naming, describing, defining, relating and separating theoretical constructs as acts of development. . . . Rather than being named in the shadows of other traditions, a Pacific research paradigm is equal to all others or nothing at all” (p. 202). This is a bold and significant agenda. The development of a Pacific research paradigm encourages researchers to deepen their knowledge about the field (Table 1 may help with key references). Through reading and interactions with fellow researchers and community members, researchers will gain a greater understanding of how our work is located socio-historically and in relation to other research approaches, what distinguishes a Pacific research approach and what we have in common with other Indigenous, interpretivist, critical or emancipatory research approaches.

As researchers, we should also stay mindful about the purpose of research and its utility to society. Research impact is best gauged by our communities, yet there are potentially negative implications of serial one-off approaches where a new approach is created for each new context or research problem. For longevity, research approaches should be generally replicable in different contexts by other researchers. We should also remember that the pursuit of knowledge is not a Pacific endeavour alone—it is a *human* endeavour. Therefore, we should seriously ponder the utility of Pacific and Pasifika research approaches for communities beyond our own.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to contribute to ongoing discussions on the evolution of Pacific research approaches. We acknowledged the history and pioneers of the contemporary Pacific research paradigm, and we socio-historically positioned the current Pacific research paradigm as one strand in the long and often undocumented history of Pacific knowledge-making. The expansion of Pacific and Pasifika research approaches is a positive development. However, researchers are encouraged to think of the Pacific research paradigm as a cumulative effort and collective movement. We have posed more questions than answers in the hope of raising clarity through dialogue and to promote the development and sustainability of research inspired by Pacific ways of knowing and being. This entails stronger critical perspectives and reflexivity on our own work.

There is value in approaching social challenges in uniquely Pacific ways, so we firmly believe that the Pacific research paradigm has much to offer both the Pacific and international knowledge communities. However, the

privilege that we as researchers have in naming, voicing, languaging, critiquing and idealising Pacific cultures in our research approaches comes with responsibilities. Emerging and non-Pacific researchers deserve clarity in the field. Moreover, researchers must stay grounded so that the language of Pacific research empowers and engages all in our communities. In our view, this will lead to research in which Pacific communities will recognise themselves and their aspirations for the future.

*Ia manuia.*

## Glossary

fale	house
Kaupapa Māori	Māori-based topic/event/ enterprise run by Māori for Māori
ia manuia	be well and prosper
tivaevae or tivaivai	Cook Islands patchwork quilt
uputaua	sacred conversations
vā	relational space

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