

Mānava ‘i he Loto Manava: Creatively Critical Tongan Sense-Making in the Glocal South

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ABSTRACT. Critical theory and theorising bring social contexts into closer observation and interrogation. Yet, our social worlds and societies are continuously evolving, so how relevant and appropriate are the critical theories developed in the Glocal South, given the dynamic and fluid contextual realities of diasporic Moana communities today? Critical theory and theorising in Te Moananui-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). As *tangata ‘o e moana* (people of the ocean, people of Oceania), our framing and analysis of criticality embodies speculative yet creative epistemological and embodied sense-making, which positions social theory and theorising in relational negotiation with tangible and intangible wonderings within Te Moananui-nui-ā-Kiwa. Doing critical theory in the Glocal South, in particular, the Moana/Oceania, calls forth a grounded speculative observation and interrogation through a Tongan lens, through the

notions of *vā* (socio-relational connections), *loto* (heart, soul), *mānava* (breath of life), *manava* (womb) and *to‘utangata Tonga* (extended family).

Keywords: critical-creative; Glocal South; Tongan sense-making; manava; mānava

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Introduction

‘Our-we-us’ reflect our collective voice and responsibilities as *Tu‘atonga*¹ educators, practitioners and members of our Tongan research communities which brought us together to do this work. We position our-we-us here because of our desire to enact *tauhi vā*² through collective collaboration, which inspired our coming together to generate this paper. As carers of the *fonua* (placenta) within the *manava* (woman or mother’s womb), Dagmar and Caroline are both daughters, mothers, sisters and aunts within their *kāinga* (extended family). Dagmar is an interdisciplinary artist and a trained primary school educator and leader. Caroline is a Pacific studies historian, university educator, paddler and passionate women’s rugby coach educator and consultant. As fathers, sons, brothers and uncles – David, Siosaia and Ioane have also benefited from their own mother’s *manava*, giving them life and enabling their *mānava ‘i he fonua*.³ Later in this paper, each of us unfolds our individual narratives and perspectives to highlight stories that inspire our *mānava ‘i he loto manava*.⁴

Our grounded articulations of critical theorising highlight concerns linked to global ideas and ideals from our local place and space – Oceania. Our framing of the Glocal South is intentional, bringing into interrogation the ways in which criticality, often framed from the global north, is (re)calibrated and (re)constituted within and from the boundaries of the Moana as an Indigenous perspective and Oceania based on the late ‘Eveli Hau‘ofa’s (1994) intentional desire to shift imposed labels and the Eurocentric view and geographic demarcation of the Islands in the region as being ‘confined spaces’ (p. 152), consisting of small yet separate Islands. From a hopeful and strengths-based lens and inspired by Hau‘ofa’s (1994) call to not limit Oceania ways, we draw inspiration from Tongan ways of knowing and feeling. For us, we do this using predominantly Tongan concepts. The concept of *mānava* means to breathe or the act of breathing. *Manava*, without the *toloi* (macron), has several meanings. *Manava* refers to ‘food taken for use when fishing for sharks’ (Churchward, 2015, p. 330). *Manava* can also refer to the womb, the place and space of physical and spiritual composition, giving life to breathe and the act of living and feeling. Churchward (2015) defines *manava* to mean ‘womb, heart, bowels, as the seat of affections or courage, stomach’ (p. 330).

Creatively critical sense-making is a practice reliant on Indigenous Moana ways of knowing-seeing-feeling-doing-being. In this paper, creative yet critical sense-making and meaning-making are expressed in our embodied (re)presentations of critical theory and theorising linked to Indigenous Moana ways of knowing-seeing-feeling-doing-being (Fa'avae et al., 2021a, 2021b). Creative criticality requires an appreciation of multiple meanings across the *loto* (heart, soul), *'atamai* (mind) and *sino* (body). Tongan concepts (and other Moana concepts) offer multiple meanings that encompass heart, soul, mind and body intimacies (Aleke-Fa'avae, 2020; Sisitoutai, 2021). In other words, critical thinking from a Tongan worldview is embodied sense-making and meaning-making (Fa'avae et al., 2021a, 2021b; Ka'ili, 2017).

Mānava with the *toloi* (macron), for instance, is the constant process of drawing breath and rejuvenating life from within and outside of the *manava* (womb), inspired intrinsically to exist and thrive. The literal definitions of *manava* and *mānava* alone cannot offer a full understanding without insight into their spiritual dimensions, meaning they are not only ideas but are living entities that encapsulate life and lived experiences and manifestations. In other words, *mānava* and *manava* contribute to a *vā*-relational life ecology that emanates *mo'ui* 'a e to'utangata Tonga,⁵ the *kāinga*'s intergenerational relational rhythms – their collective sense of purpose, aspirations and motivations. A useful addition to understanding *manava* and *mānava* is their shared active root word, *'mana*,' a non-physical power, a spiritual force and supernatural influence that empowers the artistic and creative energy of living.

In our collective view, the coupling of *mana*- (spiritual force) and *-vā* (relational space and connection) by our ancestors is by no means accidental but rather a deliberate move to inspire meaning-making for those to follow. Our Tongan ancestors appreciated and understood the intimate interplays between *'atamai-sino-laumālie* (mind-body-soul) and that such a close interconnection requires language and concepts that embody their inseparable nature, flow and rhythms. When cared for, the *vā* as a space of interconnection and relational sense-making can lead to feelings and experiences of *mana* (inspiration, empowerment). *Mana* does not stay with one person or reside in one thing or place; it is transformative and moves in-between people and land. Coupling together *mana*- and *-vā* in the forms of *mānava* or *manava* symbolises the embodied nature of *vā* interconnections manifested in human forms through the womb and breath as life-giving with a purpose to replenish the lives of *to'utangata Tonga* (generations of people). At the same time, when *vā* is *not tauhi* (cared for, nurtured) or prioritised, experiences of *mana* can result in unethical and non-generative behaviours and actions. The space of unethical and non-generative engagement can be described as *vātamaki* (Ka'ili, 2017; Tu'imana-Unga, in press). These collective socio-cultural transactions between people in general and *to'utangata* coproduce and share *mānava* and the sense-making of breathing, inhaling and exhaling life from the *manava* (womb). *Manava*, can be perceived as a spiritual abyss connecting land and people

endlessly, making homelands a central point of social relations and identity-making. However, using the term *manava* predominantly for fixed ethnic, racial, or gender identity marking destroys her *mana* (spiritual force) from its holistic and relational ecological meaning or sense-making. When we attempt to do this, people separate from the land, bringing about *manavahē* – fear and the loss of breath or life or feelings of inadequacy and not being Tongan enough. It can separate people from each other, creating *manavasi'i* – anxiety and tension amongst them, leaving life to be breathless, unrestored, unloved – the outcomes of defining who belongs and who does not, rather than identifying a place and space in which one learns to belong as they navigate and negotiate their meaningful responsibilities to *fonua* and to *'utangata*.

Mānava 'i he Loto Manava: Religious and Spiritual Framings

Vakai, koe fānau koe tofia mei a Jihova: bea koe fua oe manāva koe ene totogi. (Sāme 127:3; see Bible Society in the South Pacific, 1884, p. 644).

Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. (Psalms 127:3)

According to the *Tohi 'o e Ngaahi Sāme* (the Book of Psalms), *manāva* (womb) is described as a sacred site/space that bears fruit in the form of the *fānau* (children), which are referred to as Jihova's (God's) gifts and rewards (Bible Society in the South Pacific, 1884). In Gagana Samoa (Samoan language), *manāva* is also used to define the womb (Pratt, 2007, p. 71). The womb is implied as a giver and producer of life. Pre-colonial references to the *manāva* have been attributed to the *kumete* (the kava bowl). The bowl is a symbol of the womb, described as having strong associations with a woman's reproductive capacity, and the legs of the *kumete* symbolise her breasts (see James, 1991). In a personal interview with the late Honourable Ve'ehala, born Viliami Leilua Vi and Keeper of the Palace (Tonga) Records from 1948 to 1954, Biersack (1991) noted 'Ve'ehala explained that it is only from a lady's womb that something living comes, and the kava ceremony is a life-giving ceremony' (p. 257).

Early Western philosophy privileged mind-body separation and dichotomies (Farrell & Aune, 1979). From Oceania, *mānava 'i he loto manava* is a cultural approach centred on body-mind relationality. The Tongan conceptual understanding of *mānava 'i he loto manava* symbolises the deep yet intricate and intimate connections (as well as disconnections) that shape relational space between the body and the mind. For instance, how the *manava* (the womb) and the *mānava* (breath of life) shape and impact the ways in which Tongan people critically make meaning. The aforementioned Tongan phrase implies the inseparability of body-mind sense-making. This means that positioning *mānava* without *manava* in this paper feels incomplete and impartial. Critical theorising from the *Moana* centres on relationality and is therefore inspired by discourses of

temporal and spatial assemblages and rhythms (Ka‘ili, 2017; Māhina, 2010). Of significance are the creative ways in which the meaning-making of critical theorising is navigated and negotiated through Indigenous languages and the embodied culturally grounded and spiritual practices that sense-make being-knowing-seeing-feeling-doing in Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa.

Since post-colonial contact in Oceania, Christianity has had a cultural footprint in conceptualising Indigenous *manava* and *mānava*. The Christian God is seen and perceived as the life source, the giver of all things and the bearer of all knowledge. Despite orthodox Christian beliefs, the Tongan psyche still defaults to Indigenous views of *manava* and the womb space as a carrier of bloodlines, the source of life, innate knowledge, character-forming and measurement of entitlement. Meaning-making and sense-making begin in the *manava*, and how those meanings are manifested rests on the privilege of those that breathe life into it. This leads to the premise of our *talatalanoa* (ongoing discussion) that presents critical Tongan ways of knowledge sharing and *tālanga*, the practice of collectively breaking down ideas to build and rebuild ways of knowing, together. Because *tā* (time) and *vā* (relational space) matter to *tangata ‘o e moana* (people of the ocean), our collective meaning-making through modes that enable our critical yet creative sense-making (Ka‘ili, 2017; Mahina, 2010) is our way of honouring the life forces generated through *manava* and *mānava*.

Critical theorising from Oceania relies on decolonial practice. Suspicious of settler-colonial and neoliberal tendencies to perpetuate oppressive processes within the dominant architectures of Western-oriented schooling, our desire is to begin our critical work from Te Moananui-nui-ā-Kiwa or Oceania. Inspired by social change and transformation, critical theory positions social philosophy through a critique of society and culture to reveal and challenge power structures and associated cultural assumptions. A critical theory can be distinguished from a traditional theory through its practical purpose, often linked to active transformation and change. The extent to which a critical theory seeks human emancipation from slavery acts as a liberating influence and works to create a world that satisfies the needs and powers of human beings (see Blake & Masschelein, 2003; Farrell & Aune, 1979).

Disrupting societal norms that favour certain groups of people and communities yet oppressing others is a condition that ‘critical theory’ seeks to shift and change. In the US, race, class and ethnicity have shaped and coloured ‘critical theory’ and practice. Scholars, researchers and educators from marginalised communities have utilised ‘critical theory’ as a divergent approach and practice, seeking to transform notions and practices that oppress their wellbeing and cultural survival. However, the ideas and vernacular that continue to shape transformative thinking and practice remain Eurocentric and are often confined to Europe and the US predominantly (Farrell & Aune, 1979).

Critical Theory and Post-Truth: Embodied Fuo (Form) and Uho (Content): Rhythms of *Tā-Vā*

Mika and Matapo (2018) speculate that post-truth from a ‘Samoan lens is the ability to hear the world as an interconnected phenomenon and to respond in synchronicity with the non-human world’ (p. 187). They argue that post-truth is a latecomer through colonisation and that research in the social and education sciences denies Indigenous complexities, instead ‘opts for entrenched humanistic approaches’ (Mika & Matapo, 2018, p. 187). Critical theorising through Tongan concepts requires an appreciation of them as ‘intra-dependent entit[ies] [possessing their] own integrity’ (Mika & Matapo, 2018, p. 187). Moreover, post-truth as a critical space should open up more ‘extensive parameters of debate than simply ignoring what is taken to be truth’ (Mika & Matapo, p. 195).

Critical theory within the Global South, across the localities of Moana Indigenous, encompasses post-truth in a relationally grounded way. For Moana Indigenous people, the post-truth era and spatiality through *tā-vā* carry philosophical traditions and conditions that honour the relationality of truth and its realities through a plurality view of human subjectivities and sensibilities with the non-human world (Ka‘ili, 2017; Kalavite, 2019; Māhina, 2010; Matamua, 2021; Sisitoutai, 2021). Scholars have critiqued critical theory for its geopolitical and epistemological paradoxes (Mika & Matapo, 2018). For instance, critical theory’s historical origin can be traced back to Western European intellectual tradition and practice rooted in the Enlightenment period (Blake & Masschelein, 2003). For the critical Indigenous researcher, the application of ‘methods that destabilise the certainty that comes with human-centred research, while preserving some forms of objectivity’ (Mika & Matapo, 2018, p. 195) is what we have also attempted to implement through this paper.

Awakening Indigenous ways of seeing-knowing-being-feeling-doing is a post-truth response to decolonial criticality. Such a practice requires courageous, creatively critical sense-makers and wayfinders (Fa‘avae et al., 2021a, 2021b). Through the leadership of Hūfanga ‘Okusitino Māhina and Tevita Ka‘ili, the *tā-vā* theorists were courageous in providing what we believe was a renaissance of Moana intentionality, which enabled critical intellectualising through methods that Mika & Matapo (2018) described as an ‘oblique response that does not dispense with academic objectivity and yet rejects the Western ontology of presence that exists in the practice of referencing another’s utterance’ (p. 187). The *tā-vā* as a time-space theory of reality has been utilised interdisciplinarily across the fields of migration studies, education studies, anthropology, Pacific studies, architecture and more.

There are six key beliefs that underpin the *tā-vā* theory, which are the following: (1) ontologically, *tā* and *vā* are the common medium in which all things are, in a single level of reality; (2) epistemologically, *tā* and *vā* are socially arranged in different ways across cultures; (3) all things, in nature, mind and society, stand in eternal relations of exchange, giving rise to conflict or order; (4)

conflict and order are of the same logical status in that order is in itself an expression of conflict; (5) *tā* and *vā* are the abstract dimensions of *fuo* (form) and *uho* (content) which are in turn the concrete dimensions of *tā* and *vā*; (6) and *tā* and *vā* (like *fuo* and *uho*), are indivisible in both mind as in reality (see Māhina, 2010, p. 169). *Tā-vā* is an inquiry frame to explore the concrete yet diverse and specific realities, expressions and (re)presentations within the post-covid context for the authors – captured across the dimensions of gender, generation (*to‘utangata*), political beliefs, leadership and community status, language fluency, religious and spiritual faith, New Zealand-born and more.

The visibility of critical theory and theorising through Indigenous Moana lenses takes on forms of resistance work that matter to the land, people, places and critical spaces of epistemic tension that relies on ongoing negotiations between global demands and local framings from Indigeneity sense-making. Critical Indigenous studies scholar of Māori ancestry, Brendan Hokowhitu (2016), claims the need for a post-Indigenous studies that challenge current fixations with identity and a refocusing of their attention on the ‘immediacy of indigeneity in modernity’ (cited in Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 13). Shifting our concerns away from an obsession with identity and origin stories and addressing how Western thought systems and beliefs have come to impede Indigenous peoples’ ontology and definitions of our post-Indigenous humanity and subjectivities (Moreton-Robinson, 2016). Hokowhitu (2016) argues, ‘within a post-Indigenous studies, we need to understand our embodiment as manifestations of knowledge insurrections, to make a new story of unintelligibility and of radical intent, refusing the Western demand to be an all-knowing subject that believes it masters what it knows’ (cited in Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 13). Hokowhitu’s important theoretical insurrection offers a ‘mandate to make critical Indigenous studies monstrous’ (cited in Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 13). The renowned Indigenous Australian feminist scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2016) agrees with Hokowhitu’s theorising. Our call upon critical Indigenous sense-making positions our post-truth concerns and wonderings within the critical Indigenous studies space that centres Moana theorising through Tongan concepts and worldviews.

Mānava ‘i he Loto Manava as Tu‘a-Criticality: Breathing Life into Criticality

Our paper seeks to unpack ‘critical theory’ from a Tongan vantage point that prioritises and takes into careful consideration our sense of being and becoming (ontology) across Tonga and Aotearoa New Zealand. This way of seeing the world is creatively purposeful. How Tongan people enact (the doing) their sense of being and becoming in the world takes into careful consideration creative criticality. For instance, *tu‘a-criticality* is a way of seeing the world from outside-in-outside-in. This way of seeing the world is ongoing and iterative, dynamic and fluid. *Tu‘a-criticality* allows for colourful and meaningful analysis as educators and researchers who are constantly shifting in and out of relationally positioning ourselves and our identities across places and spaces.

The word *tu'a* has many meanings. *Tu'a* relates to a person's back; it is also linked to 'outside.' Figuratively, *tu'a* is linked to a way of seeing the world as being outside of the dominant group and norms within that society. *Tu'a* positions interrogations and analysis from the boundaries, a creative space of criticality centred on the sense-making of social and spiritual relations and connections. Although the concept of *tu'a* is linked to the hierarchy of Tongan society, that is, of the commoner social status, it also carries layered meanings based on geographic situatedness, being on the periphery of *lototonga* (Tonga as ancestral homeland). *Tu'atonga*, for example, relates to being settled or residing outside of Tonga in the diaspora of Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia or the US. The well-respected Tongan linguist Melenaite Taumoefolau (2021) alludes to *Tu'atonga* not only in the geographic sense but also in the figurative sense. She utilises *Tu'atonga* as a metaphor for Western modernity and its knowledge, ideas and practices that have now pervaded Tonga and other developing nations in the Moana.

The word 'criticality' is defined in this paper from a Western intellectual tradition and is often used to mean 'something of importance.' Critical within Western academia carries a tradition of valuing importance based on Eurocentric worldviews and perspectives. It is by no accident that the word 'criticality' looks and sounds like the term 'critical.' By pairing *tu'a* and criticality as '*tu'a*-criticality,' we are centring Indigenous Pacific framings of what is deemed important from the perspectives of educators and researchers residing in Te Moana-nui-ā-kiwa, specifically those with heritage links to Tonga yet are now residing in Aotearoa New Zealand. This way of (re)constructing critical theory positions our knowledge(s), knowings, feelings and seeings as significant sites/sights through indigeneity, gender, age, bi-racial identities, colourism, leadership and community responsibility – all worthy dimensions to unpack.

Critical theory has a long-standing history in Euro-American-centric cultural traditions. From the Frankfurt School leaders in Europe to the critical race theorists in the US, conceptualising critical theory as a tool of analysis has largely been done and framed within the Global north context (Blake & Masschelein, 2003). Intellectual thinking within Western academia provides critical theoretical undertones that privilege dominant Western criticisms. Our suspicion is that similar undertones of 'critical theory' are maintained in Western academic discourses. However, when it comes to honouring and maintaining the spirit of generosity and care for Tongan people residing in Te Moananui-nui-ā-Kiwa, addressing societal oppression and injustice can be understood through the frames of *manava*, *mānava*, *vā moe loto*, *tu'atonga* and *tu'a*-criticality.

The Talatalanoa Method: Creatively Critical Practice

Talatalanoa is a derivative of *talanoa*, a Moana/Pacific/Pasifika dialogic practice linked to storying and storytelling within the *moana*. As a cultural practice grounded in oral tradition, the repetition of 'tala-tala' symbolises an ongoing process of talking, telling, relating and dialoguing (see Churchward, 2015; Ka'ili,

2017). *Noa*, as a concept, is defined as being ‘any kind of, [...] of no particular kind; common, ordinary, [...] unreal, purely imaginary’ (Churchward, 2015, p. 378). Havea, Wright and Chand (2020) define *talatalanoa* as being a consultative process, a kind of ‘talk with a view to uncover something’ (p. 134). When coupled together as *tala-tala-noa*, *noa* as symbolic of an unknown phenomenon requires a rendering of a relational space and contexts conducive to enabling the revealing of things that matter to those involved in the *talatalanoa* exchange. However, this often depends on *tā* (time) markers in the form of beat and rhythm and *vā* (space) spatial distance and relational presence or absence, embodied in the form of relational connections or disconnections inherent with/in the people involved and the places in which *talatalanoa* takes place. The art of meaningful and heart-warming *talatalanoa* relies on the enabling of ongoing conversations guided by *vā*-relationality and the ethics of care and generosity that ensure the *tala*/stories shared through conversation (*talatalanoa*) connect with the *loto* (heart and soul) of the collective involved. In this paper, we ground *talatalanoa* as a collective discursive space for ongoing creatively critical sense-making, embodied in the local yet diverse sensibilities we utilise to capture and (re)present critical theory and theorising across our disciplinary, familial and community spaces.

More specifically, we each bring a certain creative yet critical rhythm to our embodied (re)presentations of critical theory and theorising in the moana. Ka‘ili (2017) portrays *talatalanoa* as ongoing conversations. *Talatalanoa* echoes particular dialogic rhythms associated with our diverse ways, seeings, knowings, beings and doings (Fa‘avae et al., 2021a, 2021b). Although critical thinking within scientific and academic Western-oriented schooling privileges intellectualising centred predominantly within the ‘*atamai* (mind), which forces the displacement of ‘the self’ from influencing rational thought, *talatalanoa* is a practice that centres on evoking the interconnections between the ‘*atamai* (mind), *sino* (body) and the *loto* (heart and soul), an inanimate space that houses the spirit and spiritual sense-making.

Embodied (Re)presentations of Critical Theorising

The embodied act of art-making affords space for both *mānava*, the act of breathing life and *manava*, the womb as a life force, to combine, bringing forth bodies of work that reflect the personalised narratives of the hands of the meaning-makers and creators. How more so than that of women artisans, historically and, most importantly, those creating works today? For the authors, who are living in *tu‘atonga*/the diaspora, how does the context of Aotearoa New Zealand’s current contemporary landscape affect the role of *mānava* and *manava* to manifest and critically be understood? How can a predominantly *palangi* (European) audience often appreciate static art forms that, in their very essence, are rooted in *faiva*/performance? For Dagmar, as the lead author of our collective paper, attempting her own creative, critical sense-making is evident in her exhibition ‘*Kofukofu Koloa*’ (see figure 1). She sought to investigate the notion that, within a

Tongan societal context, the performance of ceremonial culture based on the production, exchange and gifting of *koloa* is a rich and powerful way to provoke conversations that acknowledge the role and responsibility of women as conduits of recording history yet framing the future.

Figure 1

Installation shot of Aunty Ungatea's bed



Note. Kofukofu koloa, Gus Fisher Gallery, University of Auckland, <https://gusfishergallery.auckland.ac.nz/kofukofu-koloa/> Photo by Sam Hartnett. Reprinted with permission.

The ambitiousness of the project provided the necessity to call on Dagmar's own *koka'anga*, a group of women, to successfully weave together the various elements of the exhibition. The most central of their works was her 'Aunty Ungatea's Bed' – a collection of *koloa* that was carefully and articulately put together with the assistance of her cousins Lesieli Tukuniu and 'Ana Hemaloto (see figure 2). It speaks to early childhood memories of time spent in Tonga with Dagmar's Aunty Ungatea and a fascination with her four-poster bed. It was the most impressive thing in her aunt's entire home and she and her sister were made to sleep on it, and she can remember climbing up their aunt's bed because of its height off the ground, because of the *koloa* that was carefully kept beneath.

Figure 2

Folding the koloa, assisted by Lesieli Tukuniu and 'Ana Hemaloto



Note. Photo by Dagmar Dyck. Reprinted with permission.

The *faiva* of stacking the bed was performed without an audience, yet it presented a beautiful example of embodied *mānava* and *manava*. Understanding the order in which mats and *ngatu* (tapa cloth) were to be laid was symbolic of knowledge whispered down through female lines. Insomuch the production of making *koloa*, and then the process of maintaining and storing it, become opportunities for women to regenerate and share their knowledge. Her aunt Ungatea's bed is a statement of re-presenting sourced objects and *koloa* within the gallery context. Each carefully placed object highlights how memory is created and embodied in material culture.

Individuals from the same nation or ethnicity are described as belonging to imagined communities of traditions, loyalty and identity (Dyck, 2021). But how does such a claim leave individuals who are of mixed ancestries, ethnicities and racial and/or geographical communities? As a modern descendant of mixed ancestry, Dagmar often finds herself grappling with the idea of self-identity and her distanced connections with Tonga, her mother's ancestral *fonua* (Dyck, 2021). When Tongan *kāinga* (extended families) describe the *vā* that connects and disconnects, they speak of their negotiations of blood, genealogy, kinship and *fonua* sense-making. Biologically, one could argue that Dagmar, for instance, could be more German than Tongan. For many Pacific people who reside in *tu'atonga*/diaspora, settled in settler-colonial nations like New Zealand and Australia, feeling displaced from being completely accepted in either of their mixed ethnicities and heritages as well as learning to connect to parental ancestral homelands is vulnerable, and continue to shape their identities and subjectivities. Moreover, Dagmar affirms, 'Problematic to my context with a multi-racial bloodline and an upbringing located in the diaspora favouring the English language is the validity of my critical sense-making interpretations.' Therefore, if epistemologies and ontologies are translated and demonstrated through lingual and embodied practices, how do those of us with partial or denied access find our sense

of belonging and worth? The questions noted by Dagmar add layers of complexities and provide provocations for other authors in this group *talatalanoa*.

This paper seeks to unpack the Tongan concepts of *mānava* and *manava*, and through our collective *talatalanoa*, various interpretations have been unfolded. First, using religious and spiritual framing and second, the framing of *manava* and *mānava* as a physical component linked to the human body, presented as a woman, for it is a woman that gives life and breath. Each author provides distinct yet somewhat similar and shared interpretations of *mānava* and *manava*. The following sections present an analysis of our experiences as Tongan educators and academics, offering unique insights into how we, within *tu‘atonga*, uniquely enact *mānava* as a way of our sense of being and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Vā Moe Loto: Post-COVID Being and Becoming as Critical Ethico-Relational Ontology

Vā moe loto positions criticality as a creative exercise and endeavour. Our collaborative *talatalanoa* and theorising within the post-covid space is an intentional consciousness-raising of the changes and challenges associated with ethico-relational ontology. In other words, our sense of being and becoming creatively critical researchers and educators in Aotearoa–Tonga and the diaspora (Dyck, 2021; Fa‘avae et al., 2021a, 2021b). *Vā moe loto* implies a particular critical consciousness that simultaneously positions *loto* and *vā* as being inseparable. *Vā moe loto* unfolds a rhythmic criticality governed by *tā* (time) markers of *fuo* (forms), *uho* (content) and *fua* (fruit), which continue to shape our *talatalanoa* – the thinking and writing of what creatively critical looks, sounds and feels like in the post-covid consciousness at this point and juncture in our lives – thus configuring and (re)configuring our being and becoming in our in-depth relational learnings within the world.

According to Dagmar,

I lack the depth and understanding of how *mānava* is fully embodied. I offer little in the sense of my own ‘Tongan’ experience but rather a pondering on the spiritual emphasis placed on ‘being Tongan.’ When we talk about spirituality in a Tongan context, are we meaning religion as decreed by King George Tupou I in 1839 as he committed his country, his people and his posterity to God’s protection? What did *mānava* look like prior to this proclamation? And if it looked different, then can it continue to traverse iterations that aptly reflect today’s ever-changing Tongan bloodlines and experiences?

The questions raised by Dagmar are a matter of *mānava ‘i he loto manava*, for instance, how each Tongan person carries and embodies their inspiration and sense of being and becoming Tongan in *Tu‘atonga*. The ways in which each author describes their personal narratives and experiences are diverse yet similar. Such relational specificities in being and becoming Tongan in *Tu‘atonga* continue to be

fluid and dynamic as social contexts change over time. The next section articulates how each contributing author activates Tongan concepts in their creatively critical theorising.

Personal Narratives and Experiences

Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck: The Art of Resistance

People become artists out of despair.
– Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

As both artist and educator, embracing this paper as a journey to understand the reasons why I should engage with Critical Theory as a means of ethical concern and a longing for a better world highlights the positioning of the critique towards the centre of educational concerns (Blake & Masschelein, 2003). To seek an understanding of my vantage point, one needs to acknowledge how *Tu'a*-criticality as a lens offers authenticity to embrace the unique lived experience of Tongans in the diaspora. It is not a silver bullet to resolving, in my case, my own identity journey, but it does offer space for reflection, evolution and action in how we promote a dwelling place of our own knowledge to nurture and grow. The offering of an 'Other Critical Pedagogy' of Blake and Masschelein (2003), where it is not an envisaged 'positive utopia' but rather 'informed by a sharpened experience of the actual and intolerable injustice of the world as it currently exists' validates the mode of *Tu'a*-criticality. This opens the door to a call for teacher education for critical theory to have a transformative aspect.

My resistance work came as a birthright. I am a first-generation New Zealand-born child of the '70s. As an immigrant family, I learned from an early age an appreciation of customs and traditions, both Tongan and German. Without being raised with either language, these traditions became critical connectors to my cultures. Sadly, I don't recall my maternal grandparents, as both passed before I turned the age of five. I am my grandmother's namesake, and I often wonder how different my life may have been had she been around to speak Tongan to me.

Navigating the cultural invisibility that I experienced throughout my secondary years, the art room became my safe space to look inwards to make critical sense of my identity as a minority brown-skinned girl in a predominantly *palangi*⁶ middle-class all-girls school, not dark enough to be considered full Tongan or white enough to reflect my Germanic roots. The art class was the only subject where I was able to express my true and whole self and determine my own narrative. My experience echoes Beyerbach's (2011) view of the arts as a field that has the potential to provide space for marginalised voices to be heard. Despite this inner turmoil of identity, the visual arts learning area indeed offers the potentiality of how art teachers can encourage students to draw from their community relationships, cultural values, personal experiences and political viewpoints through a creative process. My art became the vehicle for my 'voice,' and as a visual arts student, I felt visible and validated, a powerful drive for success.

I consider that my ‘unique pictorial language has brought aspects of Tongan cultural heritage from the fringes to the centre of contemporary New Zealand’ (Tonga, 2016, p. 75). My art practice is rendered in the (re)constructing, (re)contextualising, (re)purposing and (re)imagining of Tongan art forms that I have long admired. I may not speak fluent Tongan but translating and galvanising traditional and ancestral knowledge into contemporary art forms is my personal response and resistance work to ‘being Tongan.’

Kalo (Caroline) Matamua: Pikipiki Hama kae Vaevae Manava – A Critical Talanga of Manava and the Mānava in Tu‘a-Tonga: Framing the Tongan Diaspora

My maternal grandfather is from ‘Eueiki, a tiny island of Tonga, known for the Kava origin story and the art of fishing and shark catching; we belong to the Shark Clan. Much of my childhood involves marine and fishing stories. My grandfather grew up serving in the *Fale Siu*, the sacred fisherman’s house, where preparatory rituals, prayer and instructions begin before the fishing. *Pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava* is a phrase that derives from the nature and purpose of each fishing quest. It describes indigenous fishing practices that allude to indigenous behaviour and perspectives on relations. The phrase involves lashing or adjoining (*pikipiki*) two canoes by the *hama* or *ama* of the canoe to share (*kae vaevae*) life source (*manava*). This practice is used metaphorically to support the importance of collaborative work for the collective good. The phrase itself describes the gathering of the fisherman at sea at the end of their fishing. They adjoin *hama*-side to balance their canoes. Their paddles are then extended out to the body of the canoe (*Katea*), with a portion of their catch shared out from their canoe. An interesting but significant aspect of this practice, there is no knowledge of what other fishermen have in their canoes. One does not ask; shared provisions are taken with gratitude and without questioning. If one does not want to share or does not have anything to share, they will still receive provisions; there is no ill feeling, and no one returns home empty-handed. Fishing is purposeful, a necessity. It has little to do with hunting, indulgence and possessions, but rather the skill of catching fish in a time of need, the display of knowledge and ‘*ofa* (love), to invigorate sharing and reciprocity, and thus complete the purpose and process of fishing.

This *talanga* is a brief but in-depth examination of this fishing term to understand its concepts in relation to understanding the *manava* between Tongans in Tonga and *tu‘a-Tonga*. A good beginning for this discourse is to unpack the active words *mana* and *va(vā)*. *Mana*, as explained earlier throughout this paper, is a spiritual wonder that can encompass someone or something with overwhelming experiences. *Vā* is often differentiated to mean the space and relations between persons; in reality, both are of the same. It is the relations between people and things that give meaning to conceptualising space between. When these two words come together to form the word *manava*, it not only means life source but, perhaps most importantly, reveals the phenomenon that takes place, the unexplained

energy, the magical powers that carry blood, people, land, gods, knowledge, in a primary place of meaning and *mana* making.

When we talk about *manava*, we think of life source, *fonua* as land, *fonua* as placenta, all of which are elements of a woman, the guardian and carrier of blood and genealogies. It is the resting of ideas on *manava* solely operating and breathing in the homeland or in one place, diminishes her *mana* flowing between the *vā* of Tonga and *tu'a-Tonga*. The static idea misunderstands *manava's* transmorphic *mānava* moving and travelling from one generation to another. In Tongan indigenous views, it is impossible to be disconnected from one's ancestors. The physical manifestation of belonging to each other is our *pito*, the navel. Like the fishermen adjoined by the *hama* and sharing out from their canoes without knowing what is in the other, we are adjoined by the *pito*, receiving your Tongan blood, Tongan *māvana* without question, without rejection or criteria, we receive regardless, completely and in whole without physical contact or sight of our ancestors *manava*. We are fused with ancient and new blood, rejuvenating, re-sourcing and transforming our *mānava* in the *vā* between kin and homeland, keeping our *manava* alive.

It is a Tongan tradition that when a mother gives birth, the child's *fonua*, or placenta, is returned to the *fonua*, or land. The placenta is perceived as still living and breathing when it is buried deep into the soil, where it will reconstitute with the *manava* of the land. Our oceans then draw life from the land we buried our *fonua* in and carry our *mānava* along our ancestral footprint in the sea, connecting and maintaining blood ties for all Tongans in Tonga and *tu'a-Tonga*.

The process of going out to sea alone and then returning to a gathering point at sea to share their catch illustrates the importance of meaningful exchanges in close or vast social spaces for the survival of their kinship. In reality, the wellbeing and longevity of the *manava* itself come from the *mānava* outside of it.

Tu'a-Tonga is a crucial vein in the *manava* of Tonga. The absence of *mānava* from *tu'a-Tonga* causes incohesive *mānava* from within and out of the *manava*, breaking relations and creating tensions. For thousands of years, our Moana ancestors lived and survived transnationally. They leave us life lessons through their own experiences that are important clues to our survival.

David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae

My maternal grandmother is from Niuafu'ou and Angahā, 'Eua. My paternal grandmother was from Taunga, a small island in the Vava'u group of Islands in Tonga, and her mother was from Pukotala, Ha'apai. My mum and sisters continue to nurture love, care and generosity with us. Their insights and motivations continue to fuel the intergenerational maternal *manava* embraced across the *mānava* rhythms within our *kāinga*.

Fa'a fakaanga or *anga fakaanga* means 'critical, criticising, or criticise' (Churchward, 2015, p. 616). '*Taha 'oku fakaanga*' is used to refer to a critic. Does critical theorising stem from the terms 'critical' or 'criticising'? Both terms are of a

particular way of thinking that challenges the status quo and practices that are normalised within society. For collectivist societies like Tongan society, the ideas of ‘critical’ and ‘criticising’ are often linked to the ways people’s attitudes and behaviours are shaped by their society and social groupings. The concept ‘*vale*’ is used to describe people who are foolish, silly, ignorant, unskilled, incapable, or incompetent) (Churchward, 2015, p. 533). In the context of mental health, *vale* is used to refer to people with schizophrenia, anxiety and depression. On the other spectrum linked to positive spirit/*laumālie*, ‘*poto*’ is associated with in-depth understanding that highlights one’s capability to acquire knowledge and skills, plus having the *laumālie* to utilise such knowledge/s and skills to benefit others within the collective.

Practices based on critical theoretical traditions activate ‘action, transformation and change.’ In a keynote address by Robin Havea (2022), a mathematician trained under the tutelage of the late Futa Helu and ‘Atenisi traditions of thinking, he argues that *poto* relies on the skill of doing. He reflected on a time when Futa Helu was asked during a *faikava* (social kava gathering), ‘*Teke lava ‘o tala mai ko e tokotaha poto koe?*’ (can you tell me whether you are a knowledgeable/wise person?). For Helu, the question was incomplete because it assumes that one can know everything in the world. Instead, he thought a worthwhile question that should have been asked was, ‘*Teke lava ‘o tala mai ko e tokotaha poto he ha?*’ Havea’s (2022) interpretation is that *poto* or *fakapotopoto* is determined by one having the capability to ‘do’ and ‘implement knowledge/s,’ rather than just acquiring it only to get a qualification. Creatively critical practice is learning to negotiate and sense-make the inseparability of know-see-feel-do-be-become *fakapotopoto*.

The renowned poet and Moana educator Konai Helu Thaman (1988) positions ‘*poto*’ and ‘*fakapotopoto*’ as the knowing and doing of wisdom. My claim is that ‘seeing, feeling, being and becoming’ are also significant aspects of *fakapotopoto* because to utilise the skills and knowledge one acquires through formal learning is to identify and express the conditions of ‘*tauhi*’ (nurturing and caring for) *vā* interconnections or interrelations. Thaman (1988) makes a distinction between *ako*, ‘*ilo* and *poto* to show the variability in what is perceived as worthwhile knowledge by Tongan communities in our society. Her 1974 poem titled ‘Reality’ provides us with lots to think about enacting *fakapotopoto* as a representation of creatively critical practice. *Fakapotopoto* is not only the doing and enacting of critical theory, which involves intimately connecting understanding of critical practice within the *loto* (soul), ‘*atamai* (mind) and *sino* (body).

I am a big boy now
I have left school;
But I am a fool still
... I hear people laughing
what are you going to do now
with your education and all?

There is the marketplace
... I cannot do that
I have a certificate
... What do I do now?
An old man close by whispers
Come fishing with me today
For you have a lot to learn yet. (Thaman, 1974, p. 17)

Enacting critical theory in creative forms is *fakapotopoto* and involves Indigenous and local ceremonies grounded in *mānava* ‘*i he loto manava* and *vā moe loto*. Creatively critical work shifts an infatuation with the self towards learning to serve others. This type of criticality feels right and is centred on *vā māfana* (relational warmth). Shawn Wilson (2008) positions research practice through storytelling forms as ceremony because they aesthetically bring to close distance an assemblage of past-present-future utterances, as well as ideas, knowledge and practices that align with the lived experiences of Indigenous communities. At the same time, such creatively critical practices are intergenerationally driven (Fa’avae et al., 2021a, 2021b).

Siosaia Sisitoutai

Pasifika thinking patterns are distinctive and occasionally countermove to those of western origins. The late Reverend Dr Tevita Tonga Mohenoa Puloka, a Tongan theologian, claimed, ‘we [Pasifika] think in curves, not in straight lines or linear fashion; we think in circular forms...’ (Ernst & Johnson, 2017, p. 391). He asserted that history, present and future are not written in a straight and forward motion, but always go backwards in order to move forward. What appears to be linear in the mind of Western philosophers seems to move in a circular motion for a Tongan metaphysician. This paradigm of thinking is related to how Tongan and other Pasifika counterparts are modifying and transforming *kele’a* (the conch shell) to become an instrument for calling. During these procedures of modification and transformation, the sculptor experiences critical thinking as he/she internalises and visualises the circular path for air movement within the conch shell.

Kele’a is a form of wind instrument made from the shells of sea snails (Turbinellidae) and used by Tongans and other Pasifika natives for communication purposes. Traditionally, *kele’a* was used as a sounding instrument in the ocean or for activities that are closely related to the sea. Contemporary Tongan sculptor, Filipe Tohi, posits that Tongans used many sounding instruments on various occasions and dedicated *kele’a* for seafaring undertakings (F. Tohi, personal communication, March 16, 2022). Just as a particular beat of the *lali* (wooden drum) tells one thing in Tonga, different patterns of blowing the *kele’a* send a specific message to the communities and villagers (ibid.). Whatever the message might be, it was broadly a common means to amplify one’s thoughts and voice for the union of people.

Kele'a symbolises unity, collaboration and friendship. Although the people across Te-Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa are diverse in languages and cultures, they can be unified by the voice of *kele'a* (conch shell). A voice that brings the Pacific people together on various occasions in contemporary contexts. Under that one voice, Pasifika people would hear her calling and respond accordingly. Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Jacinda Ardern paid tribute to the sacrifices made by the Pacific peoples who supported New Zealand during World War I and II (and the global conflicts that followed) when she unveiled a commemorative statue of a conch shell at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park (Tangata Pasifika, 2021). She claims that *kele'a* is 'a symbol of the special bond and enduring friendship [between Aotearoa New Zealand and its] Pacific neighbours' (ibid). Not only does it bring Pacific communities together, but it also relates us to the rest of the world by creating a space of relationality through its *ongo* (sound) and *le'o* (voice).

Ioane Aleke Fa'avae

Growing up with Tongan and Niue heritage can be emotional and overwhelming, particularly when you are born and fully immersed in the dominant culture, then *anga-faka-Tonga* (Tongan culture). I share experiences being a Tongan living in the diaspora. I learn that being Tongan in *mānava* is determined by various underlying spiritual, cultural, linguistic and social interactions that are either visible or invisible connections. *Mānava* shelters and protects you from the realities of being Tongan in the diaspora. It is the vehicle and hidden space that guards and connects you to the fonua that anchors your heritage. Despite being Tongan in diaspora, *mānava* determines one's identity in the absence of living on the *fonua*.

Being born away and outside of the Tongan *fonua*, refers to that of *mānava* where input is driven by an individual or collective force. At times, you feel excluded from many cultural settings even though you are grounded in the culture and speak *lea faka-Tonga*. Such merits are not considered but are measured by the fonua or environment that you are born into and your interactions with others. And, within *mānava*, that is fortified by *fonua* that links to the *pito* by which the spiritual essence invisibly nourishes and nurtures you as a Tongan. Although Tongans are brought up in Tonga, there seems to be an underlying disconnect within the *mānava* that encompasses and safeguards the identity of being a Tongan. The factors that surround the *mānava*, determine the Tongan identity. As Tongan *tu'a*, you learn and go through experiences that make you feel excluded from many settings.

Ongoing Talatalanoa

Through each contributing author, critical theory and theorising from a Tongan lens embody creative inspiration and motivation. Such creatively critical gazes highlight the variability and nuances within each narrative and the ways in which collective collaboration has strengthened our relational being and becoming Tongan in *Tu'atonga*. We arrive at this particular point in our paper with insights

that will continue to fuel our desire to further capitalise on the *mānava* 'i he *loto manava* ways in *Tu'atonga*. Doing critical theory in the Moana/Oceania as a Glocal South contribution positions relationality as embodied sense-making and social theory as a negotiation of *vā*, *loto*, *mānava*, *manava* and *to'utangata* meaning-making.



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All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and the integrity of the data analysis.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

NOTES

1. A generative and constructive positionality that enables creative critical theorising utilising Tongan knowledge, ideas, values, and practices outside of Tonga, our ancestral homeland.

2. Caring for respectful and ethical relations and relationships.

3. Living life in their current place of residence.

4. A Tongan symbolism of the life-giving, loto-driven, and loto-inspired thinking, feeling, seeing, and doing in *Tu'atonga*.

5. The lives of generations of Tongan people.

6. The Tongan term *palangi* (shortened to *papalangi*) means 'people from the sky.' When Captain Cook sailed into Tonga, the locals thought the tall masts of the ship went into the sky, so they called its sailors *papalangi*. Since only Europeans came off the ship, *papalangi* evolved into 'white people' (McCoy & Havea, 2006, p. 3).

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