

## **Vā-kā: Igniting the space between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research relations**

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### **Abstract**

For decades, Māori, the Mana Whenua<sup>1</sup> of Aotearoa/New Zealand, have formed powerful research relationships with the decolonising agendas in Hawai'i and North America. These mana-enhancing alliances have forged strong connections, such as supporting language revitalisation in Hawai'i, the decolonisation of education, as well as land protection struggles on Mauna Kea in Hawai'i and the Dakota Pipeline protests on the mainland United States. These global research relationships amongst Indigenous peoples have been of critical importance, as we draw on each other's strengths and determination to effect change and support decolonialisation. However, in doing so Mana Whenua research has often 'flown over' our closest Mana Moana relations in the Pacific who, through their own active and critical scholarly engagement, have produced their own transforming research seascape. Igniting the space between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research alliances offers a crucial and timely return to ancient Moana relationships in the service of transforming our current lived realities. Conceptually, we lash together in this article the Pasifika term *vā* (relational time and space) with the Māori term 'kā' (to ignite, to consider, to be in action) as a theorised methodology that emerges from the language, connections and ways of being which sustain us as both Mana Whenua and Mana Moana. We encourage Māori and Pasifika researchers to come together in purposeful and transformational ways, to *pikipiki hama*—a Tongan expression meaning 'lash our canoes together'—to support our common, and differing aspirations for radical change in Higher Education. We support this methodology by sharing our experiences as a Māori researcher and a Tongan researcher working in Higher Education to transform the tertiary land-/seascape for Māori and Pasifika students.

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<sup>1</sup> We choose to capitalise 'Mana Whenua', 'Mana Moana' and 'Vā-kā' throughout this article to make clear that we are naming these as distinct conceptual ideas that, like a personal name, have genealogy and meaning.

**Keywords:** Māori and Pacific research; Methodology; Higher education; Vā-kā

## Introduction

Calling Aotearoa/New Zealand Higher Education: We have a problem. Put simply, Māori (the Mana Whenua of Aotearoa/New Zealand) and Mana Moana (our closest Pacific relations) do not talk together enough about our research. We are connected through whakapapa (genealogy), language, ancestral ties and shared (and differing) traditional stories while simultaneously maintaining and asserting identities that are complex and heterogenous—identities which directly connect us to the Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean; hereafter referred to as ‘Te Moana’), and to this whenua (land) Aotearoa/New Zealand. Our shared recent histories of colonisation, capitalism, changing connections to land, language and identity mean that we are regularly and problematically homogenised. In Higher Education, the terms ‘Māori’ (who identify themselves in iwi [tribal], hapū [sub-tribal] and whānau [family groupings]) and Pasifika (who identify as family and village collectives within larger island regions) are used as simplistic descriptors of complex and multi-layered identities.

While continuing to interrogate and complexify identities and how they are used in education is important (Anae, 1997; Thaman, 1997; Webber, 2008), this article charts a different course: to encourage Mana Whenua and Mana Moana researchers to ‘ignite the research space between us’ in a way that seeks to maintain sovereignty as we support our multiple and diverse educational agendas. We offer here a theorised methodology we name ‘Vā-kā’ as one example of a way to re-voyage our ancient Moana relationships. It is our attempt to re-navigate, re-connect and re-ignite the space(s) that bind us as Māori and Pasifika peoples in the context of transformative Moana research.

We do not set out to provide a ‘How to Do Mana Whenua–Mana Moana Research’ manual. Doing so would ignore our diverse institutional, cultural and relational diversity. Instead, we offer our own experiences as encouragement to other Mana Whenua/Mana Moana to consciously develop

and strengthen our research connections from a strengths-based relationality and to look to our own shared and differing languages, beliefs and values to theorise research approaches that serve our common aspirations.

Moana concepts of voyaging deliberately ‘ebb and flow’ throughout this article. Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa is the largest body of water on the planet and has for millennia sustained and nurtured our ancestors who learned to live in harmony with its rhythms. From food source to transport highway, from cleanser of the land through to the holder of stories, Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa has shaped and formed the identities of its people with each lap of its waves upon islands from the sovereign kingdom of Hawai‘i in the north, to Rapa Nui in the east, and from the eastern seaboard of Australia in the west to Aotearoa/New Zealand in the south.

Mana Whenua and Mana Moana bodies of theory and research have necessarily developed their own distinct approaches in response to both the different and similar issues that our diverse groups encounter. Kaupapa Māori theory, for example, emerged as a radical response from Māori academics in the 1990s to create space for Māori-centric thinking and research in the academy, or what Māori scholar Leonie Pihama (2001, p. 77) names as “culturally defined theoretical space”. Articulated by a number of prominent Māori academics (Henry & Pene, 2001; Irwin, 1994; Lee, 2008; Pihama, 2001; G. H. Smith, 2003; L. T. Smith, 1999), Kaupapa Māori places Māori language, values and beliefs at its centre, and encourages Māori researchers to look to their own sets of mātauranga (knowledge) to develop approaches to research. From this theoretical foundation, robust and innovative Kaupapa Māori research has for the last 30 years tackled an array of research problems across multi-disciplinary fields both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and abroad.

Similarly, Pasifika theory has developed a number of innovative research approaches such as Kakala (Johansson-Fua, 2014; Thaman, 1993), Talanoa (Fa‘avae, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006), Tivaevae (Maua-Hodges, 2001) and the Vanua framework (Nabobo-Baba, 2006), to name just a few. In addition, we acknowledge and lean on the work of Pasifika scholars such as Albert Wendt, Epli Hau‘ofa, David Gegeo and Manulani Meyer as voyaging pioneers who

have theorised, contested and foregrounded Indigenous knowledges and research methods from within Te Moana.

It could be argued that Mana Whenua and Mana Moana peoples have been socially set against each other through systemic racism and societal structures that have forced us to compare and contrast ourselves rather than compel us to collaborate and collectivise (Anae et.al, 2015; Harris, 2004; Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). Airini et al. (2010), for example, discuss the need for Pasifika researchers to *teu le va*—or nurture relationships—with Mana Whenua and vice versa in order to grow Māori and Pasifika research space. Imagine the potential disruption to the mono-cultural social and political status quo in Aotearoa/New Zealand that would result from a strengthened political, social and economic alliance of Mana Whenua and Mana Moana energy.

There are significant examples of Mana Whenua and Mana Moana collaboration in action in our broader Indigenous contexts. Consider the inter-Indigenous knowledge exchanges between Māori, Hawaiian, Tahitian and other Pasifika nations to revitalise knowledge of ocean-going vessels (Evans, 2015; Howe, 2006). Or research in the arts space where forums such as the Pacific Arts Festival draw together artists from all four winds of Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa to share theory, research and practice. Yet Mana Whenua and Mana Moana theoretical collaboration in education, particularly Higher Education, in Aotearoa/New Zealand seems to lag behind the fleet.

A recent example of Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research in conversation with each other is a book chapter written by Samoan criminologist Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni (2017). She writes about a direct relationship between the *va* and Kaupapa Māori, discussing the need for “a more deliberate conversation between Pasifika researchers about how to go about engaging with Māori peoples and with research tools, concepts, and theories, including Kaupapa Māori” (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017, p. 162). We align with Suaalii-Sauni’s assertion that the time is ripe to ignite the space between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research, to come together and meet in ways that enhance our individual and wider collective research agenda.

There is a need for more and more-productive conversations between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana researchers, our concepts and cultural frameworks that recognise the heterogeneous nature of Māori and Pasifika identities. When Emalani Case, a Hawaiian scholar who teaches in Aotearoa/New Zealand, considers her identities in and with the Pacific, she highlights both opportunities to connect and obligations of a Pacific regional identity. It is a realisation that our relationships to each other can help us to advance our collective interests rather than homogenise and subtract from our identities (Case, 2021). Resisting the tendency to homogenise identities and/or re-entrench boundaries between these groups, we instead, as noted above, seek to ‘ignite the research space between’ by theorising an approach that encourages Māori and Pasifika researchers to come together, each bringing with them, and maintaining, their sovereign ways of being to advance collaborative research that supports our wider, multiple and complex agenda. The Vā-kā methodology that we outline here offers a way to facilitate this kind of purposeful and deliberate conversation.

Here we share our experience as a Māori researcher and a Tongan researcher, respectively. We are friends and colleagues, working in Higher Education to transform the tertiary land- and seascape for Māori and Pasifika students. Conceptually we lash together the Pasifika term *vā* (relational time and space) with the Māori term ‘kā’ (to ignite, to consider, to be in action) as a theorised methodology that emerged from a two-year Māori and Pasifika-led research fellowship (Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2020a; Wolfgramm-Foliaki & Smith, 2020). We encourage Māori and Pasifika researchers to come together in purposeful and transforming ways, not to further homogenise but to lash our *waka/vaka* (canoes) together and thereby ignite the *vā*—the relational space where Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research meets to support our common, and differing aspirations, for change in Higher Education.

We begin, as is expected in Māori and Pasifika spaces, by introducing ourselves before providing some context of the He Vaka Moana research fellowship from which a Vā-kā methodology emerged. The central role of reframing and advancing Mana Whenua and Mana Moana language and

knowledge in this methodology is explained as we lash together two common Pasifika words in an uncommon way. The Tongan proverb *pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava* is unpacked to explain our conceptualisation of our Mana Whenua–Mana Moana research relationship. Finally, we set out our aspirations for Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research going forward, encouraging, in fact imploring, that increased energy is put into Māori and Pasifika research alliances that are innovative, purposeful, mana-ful and, most importantly, emerge from our Moana ways of knowing and doing.

### **Mana: Power, influence and responsibility**

‘Mana’—four letters that hold an indefinable power and depth and form a word that lives vibrantly in many languages of Te Moana. It is one of a number of Moana terms, like *aroha/ aloha/ ofa* (compassion, empathy, affection, love) for example, that is difficult to define and explain outside of our respective Moana languages and epistemologies. ‘Mana’ as a term has been taken up by the dominant language and culture in Aotearoa/New Zealand, problematically simplifying a complex and deeply meaningful term. It is not unusual to hear a sports commentator for example describing a charismatic rugby captain as having great mana or indeed to read social media comments exclaiming that someone has no mana. An overly ambitious person might be accused of being a ‘mana hunter’, while someone who is constantly negative is a ‘mana muncher’. As we explain below, everything, both animate and inanimate, has mana. It is therefore important that we set out how we understand mana in our experiences as Mana Whenua and Mana Moana.

For over 200 years Western scholarship has attempted to define and explain, translate and ascribe meaning to the term ‘mana’. A Hawaiian language dictionary dating from the nineteenth century defines ‘mana’ as “divine power”, “strong” and “to render homage” (Andrews, 1836, as cited in Tomlinson & Tengan, 2016, p. 2), and a Samoan dictionary from the same century defines ‘mana’ as “supernatural power” (Pratt, 1862, as cited in Tomlinson & Tengan, 2016, p. 3). While useful, these early descriptions and interpretations by predominately European male ethnographers and

explorers of the time work to reify mana as something otherworldly, unattainable and godlike, reserved for those of chiefly status (usually men).

Geographically and chronologically closer to home, *Te Aka Māori Dictionary* defines ‘mana’ as “prestige, authority, control, power, influence”—“a supernatural force in a person, place or object” (Moorfield, n.d.). We align with a description of mana and its sub-levels of mana atua (the power of the gods); mana tupuna (the power of the ancestors); and mana tāngata (our individual and collective power as people) (see Barlow, 2009; Mead, 2003; Pere, 1991; Pohatu, 2003; Walker, 1990). Case (2021, p. 35) brings a political and decolonising imperative to the term when she draws on mana as “the power and influence of our ancestors, to examine the impacts of colonialism . . . in ways that challenge hegemonic structures”.

For a person, mana, or mana tāngata, can be understood as reputation, social standing or influence. One’s mana tāngata, or how one is perceived, can increase or decrease depending on one’s words, actions and interactions. In this sense the mana (reputation and influence) we, the authors, have in the work that we do as Mana Whenua and Mana Moana academics comes with a weighty responsibility to use that mana not for our individual benefit but for a wider collective good. We forward this notion of mana as being in service to our people as a common aspiration that ignites the space between us as Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research relations.

### **Mana Whenua and Mana Moana meet**

This article could easily have been entitled ‘The Haka and the Tau’olunga’ to describe the authors’ research relationship. The haka (standing metaphorically for Hinekura) is a rhythmic dance of vigorous movements accompanied by stamping of the feet on the whenua, facial expressions, and loud vocalising of words. The *tau’olunga* (standing metaphorically for ‘Ema) is a graceful dance with a series of elegant hand and fluid body movements that transmit the meaning of the song, reflecting the rhythmic ebb and flow of Te Moana. While our style of dance is strikingly different, both performances are persuasive and elegant in their own way. Both serve to make connections and tell a story. In our relationship, sometimes it is the graceful *tau’olunga* that

takes centre stage; at other times a good loud haka serves our purposes best. The real skill, however, is performing the haka and the *tau'olunga* in tandem, side by side, each enhancing the mana of the other's way of being without overpowering, or being subsumed by, it.

While some may struggle to hear the harmony of our combined voices and dances, we hear and we feel the mana of the space between us ignite when we 'dance' together. Here we contend that when performing our haka and *tau'olunga* together we are also making meaningful connections between the 'lyrics and tune' (Kepa & Manu'atu 2012) of academia and our cultural ways of being. In this process we experience what Manu'atu (2000) describes as the notion of *malie* (energy) and *mafana* (passion) that moves, transforms and uplifts the heart and soul. *Malie* and *mafana* are inseparable as processes and energies. Manu'atu (2000, p. 77) argues that *malie* (and *mafana*), "when experienced, transcends fear and other forms of social construction that 'put down' or oppress people". The notions of mana, *malie* and *mafana* combine to fan the flames and ignite the mana-ful space that we purposefully create between our research.

'Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki, a Tongan-born woman from the islands of Falevai, Vava'u, Tongaleleka, Ha'apai and 'Atataa, is a lecturer and academic developer at the University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau with an interest in 'first in the family' Pasifika graduates. Hinekura Smith is a Māori woman from the Te Rarawa and Ngā Puhi tribal groupings of Aotearoa/New Zealand. A Kaupapa Māori researcher, lecturer and artist, Hinekura has a keen interest in decolonising tertiary education spaces, activist arts research, Kaupapa Māori methodologies, and supporting Māori and Indigenous postgraduate students. After working together as academic developers at the University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau for the last four years we have become keenly interested in how Mana Whenua (Māori) and Mana Moana (Pasifika) academics can further enhance our Moana research relationships to create change for our students and colleagues in the tertiary sector. In 2017 we had the opportunity to research and further develop our Mana Whenua-Mana Moana relationship through a co-led two-year Māori and Pasifika

research fellowship at the University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau that we named 'He Vaka Moana'.

### **The He Vaka Moana journey**

He Vaka Moana set out to develop a fellowship of interdisciplinary academic and professional staff in teaching, learning, assessment and research at the University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau comprising nine research fellows who were understood as 'wayfinders'. In 2017 expressions of interest were received from potential fellows in each faculty, with the endorsement of their Dean, to commit to a one-year faculty-specific fellowship around Māori student and Pasifika student 'success'. Each fellow received a 0.2 FTTE (full-time teacher equivalent) time release and some fellows also applied for a small support grant of NZ\$5,000 to support hosting events, research assistance, resource development, and data gathering. The one-year fellowship was hosted at the former Centre for Learning & Research in Higher Education (CLear). Alongside the support from CLear, a two-year Ako Aotearoa/funded research project supported the fellows to continue their projects and to be able to evaluate their work over two years (see the 2020 special issue of *MAI Journal* we co-edited for more detail on individual projects and the fellowship).

The He Vaka Moana research fellowship was an opportunity for academic and professional staff to come together in purposeful and deliberate ways to research teaching, and thus share practices that promote Māori and Pasifika students' success in Higher Education. In brief, monthly hui (meetings) were hosted at CLear, with guest speakers, regular professional development events, workshops, *talanoa* (conversation) groups and writing retreats. Two full-day symposia were also hosted, one in 2018 and one in 2019; both were well attended by academic and professional staff from a number of universities, community members, and senior university leadership. Two of the He Vaka Moana fellows were supported to present at an overseas conference on Higher Education, and four fellows presented as a panel at the International Indigenous Research Conference held in Auckland in 2018.

The concept of *vaka* or *waka* has been utilised in a number of useful ways in education. The terms *vaka* (Tongan, Samoan), *wa'a* (Hawai'i) and 'waka' (Māori) can all be broadly defined as a canoe, vessel, vehicle or conveyance. There are many sub-types too, such as *waka taua* (war canoes), a *waka ama* (outrigger canoe) and, in the present context, *waka moana* (ocean-going vessel) (Evans, 2005). A resurgence of interest in ocean voyaging across Te Moana has generated a sea swell of literature in the area of *waka moana* and sea navigation (Evans, 2015; Howe, 2006), reclaiming a rich source of maritime knowledge once in danger of being lost. *Vaka* have for generations served as powerful conceptual symbols of relationship and connection. For example, in Vanuatu:

The tree symbolizes rootedness in culture, while the canoe stands for movement along sea routes that connect people of different island locations. The canoe is history – the working out of relationships established through travel and movement of materials from one island to another. One may extend this metaphor to include present-day connections between Oceania and the surrounding continental landmasses and cultures. (Hau'ofa, 2008, p. 81)

More recently, *vaka* and its associated ocean terminology have been utilised as a conceptual framework for artistic practices (Looser, 2015) and in areas such as leadership (Spiller et al., 2015), to name just a few. In Higher Education the idea of *vaka moana* has been useful to bring students together in relationships and to encourage positive learning experiences (Teaiwa, 1994; 2017). In Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau, for example, *Vaka Moana* is the name of a successful academic advancement programme grounded in Moana values to nurture the relationships between students and tutors.

We conceptualised He *Vaka Moana* as a collaborative research fellowship by drawing on the shared success of our tūpuna (ancestors) who for hundreds of years navigated Te Moana in deliberate and purposeful ways. Successful Oceanic journeys were enabled through the development of large ocean-going *vaka moana*, *waka moana* or *wa'a*, drawing on deeply

methodological Indigenous knowledge of Te Moana, its tides, celestial navigation and weather conditions. These epic voyages could not be undertaken in isolation. Whilst on Te Moana and often far from land, *vaka moana* would routinely come alongside and lash together to share resources and provisions, learn from each other's experiences, share stories of their journey, and sometimes even to swap crew members. At other times, *vaka moana* lashed together to ride out a storm, as one larger, unified vessel is stronger and more resistant to the conditions than many smaller ones, before unlash and heading off on their journeys. Many hundreds of years later the descendants of these methodological and strategic Moana navigators continue to come together in deliberate and purposeful ways. Now, instead of crisscrossing Te Moana, our voyages in this context are navigations to connect as relations in research space. Having named our fellowship He Vaka Moana, we sought to access our individual sets of Mana Whenua and Mana Moana knowledge to theorise how to ignite the space between us.

### **Mana Whenua and Mana Moana making (theoretical) waves**

As Mana Whenua and Mana Moana peoples, we have always developed our own methodologies or ways of approaching problems. Our mātauranga has for centuries enabled us to explore, adapt and advance our technologies and praxis (Efi, 2003; Hau'ofa 2008; Kovach, 2009; Pihama, 2008; L. T. Smith, 1999; Thaman, 1998). Yet the idea of methodology, in our more recent history, has been captured and claimed by the Academy, nudging our ancient ways of research to the academic margins. In this section we turn to our own Mana Whenua and Mana Moana scholars, who have chartered similar courses through the sea of literature, connecting islands of theory that create and reinforce our whakapapa links.

Methodology, as an element of research, is an immutable aspect of academic scholarship. It refers to the concepts and theories that frame the way research is conducted; that is, the knowledges and influences that underpin research as a process for creating 'new' knowledge. Over the last 40 years, broader Indigenous research methodologies within an academic context have taken up critical Indigenous theories (Kovach, 2005, 2009; L. T.

Smith, 1999) that seek to re-claim, re-frame, and re-present the lived realities of Indigenous peoples. Rather than accept orthodox Western academic understandings of methodology, we are encouraged by other Indigenous researchers to look to our own 'ways of being in the world' based on our own methodologies to create new knowledges that will serve us in our current lived realities. By re-claiming methodology as an aspect of being Indigenous that has for centuries served our people and allowed them to flourish, we are re-framing how orthodox research methodology can be viewed both within academic scholarship and praxis.

Globally, Indigenous methodologies have evolved to fit a contemporary reality shaped by the struggle to resist the assault of colonisation through projects of cultural reclamation. Educationalist and academic Leah Abayao (2006, p. 180) discusses Indigenous methodology as that which is "acquired over generations by communities as they interact with the environment . . . exploring indigenous technological knowledge and knowledge transmission systems, and recasting the potentialities they represent".

Eminent Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) strongly advocates for re-framing and re-claiming methodologies as a critical element of a strategic Indigenous research agenda. She discusses the tides, or states of survival, recovery, development and self-determination, that intersect with those of decolonisation, healing, transformation and mobilization, none of which are linear; nor are they goals or ends in themselves. Instead, they are "processes which connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global . . . processes which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies" (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 116).

Kaupapa Māori scholar Leonie Pihama (2001) reminds us that theory and methodology did not arrive with the coloniser. Rather, Indigenous peoples have for centuries engaged in their own forms of methodological research to test theories and advance thinking:

As Māori we have a history of investigation. It is an ancient history of exploration, of navigation, not solely in the physical domain, but in ways that reach throughout the many dimensions

of Te Ao Māori. These are all forms of research, they are all ways within which our people have developed knowledge and have located ourselves in the wider world. (Pihama, 2001, p. 47)

Consider for example the sophisticated navigational systems developed by our early ancestral sea voyagers that enabled them to criss-cross Te Moana, technologies later regarded as superior to those of the Western world at the time (Evans, 2015). Navigational methods and methodologies that enabled extensive Moana travel required high-level theorisation, research, development and testing in order for return voyages across vast expanses of ocean to succeed. Pasifika navigation is known to involve methodical systems that enabled Moana people to travel and successfully populate the countless number of islands in the region (Evans, 2015).

Importantly, here we argue that methodology is a lived experience (a praxis, if you will) of lashing together the theory and practice; the thinking and doing. We argue that a Vā-kā methodology cannot be understood solely from a theoretical perspective but must be enacted, embodied and experienced. Important to note here that in line with *vā*, the ‘I’ or ‘self’ is viewed in relation to others or the collective (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). As such, a Vā-kā methodology insists upon researchers understanding the holistic and collective ‘who’ they bring to a research relationship—their language, their identity, their intent, and their contribution to igniting the research space.

### **The *vā* and the *kā***

Vā has been theorised, embodied and enacted in research in a number of persuasive ways by Pasifika scholars (Anae, 2010; Autagavaia, 2001; Fa’avae, 2016; Māhina, 2010; Pene et al., 2002; Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). Suaalii-Sauni (2017, p. 163) describes the *vā* as “a central organizing principle in many Pasifika cultures [that] governs all inter-personal, inter-group, and sacred/secular relations and is intimately connected to a Pasifika sense of self or identity”. In an Aotearoa/New Zealand Ministry of Education report on relationships across research and policy, Airini et al. (2010, p. 10) outline that:

Va – or vā, va‘a, vaha – can be loosely translated as a spatial way of conceiving the secular and spiritual dimensions of relationships and relational order, that facilitates both personal and collective well-being, and *teu le vā* as the valuing, nurturing and looking after of these relationships to achieve optimal outcomes for all stakeholders.

Tēvita O. Ka‘ili (2005) offers a Tongan scholar’s perspective to Moana notions of *vā*. He describes *vā* as both social relationships and space, and *tauhi vā* as the Tongan value and practice of “keeping good relations . . . to tend, or to nurture”, noting and that “the performance of *tauhi vā* is often etched forever in the memories of people involved in the process” (Ka‘ili, 2005, pp. 92–93). Samoan scholar Melani Anae (2010, p. 13) takes *vā* one step further, theorising a Samoan concept of *teu le vā* or the action of nurturing the *vā*; that is, ‘to look after the space’, adding that “by its very nature *teu le vā* has multi-relational, situational and spiritual references”. Significantly, Anae’s theory highlights the unique role of the *vā* within a Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research relationship. She notes the importance of “nurturing the *vā* and spaces that have already been created by *tāngata whenua*” (Anae, 2010, p. 17) as a means of acknowledging the special status of Mana Whenua in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Māori-language definitions of ‘wā’ (the Māori derivative of *vā*) are also relevant to our theorisation. ‘Wā’ is defined in *A Dictionary of the Māori Language* as “definite space, time” (Williams, 1997, p. 472) while the *The Reed Dictionary of Modern Māori* defines ‘wā’ as “an opportunity” (Ryan, 1995, p. 330). The term ‘wā’ appears in a number of Māori words such as ‘wāhi’ (space to move), ‘wānanga’ (a learning or knowledge creation space) and *wātea* (to be clear of thought or free of burden). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses the concepts of time and space being particularly significant to Indigenous peoples, highlighting the importance of reclaiming these ideas in a decolonising research agenda. She challenges us to consider the relationship that exists, in a Māori sense, between time and space when “space is often viewed in Western thinking as being static or divorced from time” (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 52). In many Indigenous languages there is no clear distinction

between the notions of time and space, including the Māori language: the word for time and space—‘wā’—is one in the same.

The Māori word ‘kā’ (with a macron) means to make fire, to be lighted or ignited and allowed to burn. Interestingly ‘ka’ (without a macron) also lends itself to our idea of research relationships in that it means the commencement of a new action or condition (Williams, 1997, p. 81). By drawing on our knowledge of our respective languages to lash together a Māori term with a Pasifika term, we prepare the way for enacting Vā-kā, the igniting of the relationship between ourselves as a Māori researcher and a Pasifika researcher, between time and space, between interests and reciprocal ties that have for generations nurtured and bound us as Moana peoples. It is important to reiterate here that underpinning both *vā* and *wā* is a commitment to ensure that the *vā* is nurtured and maintained, not just for research purposes but in all aspects of how we as Mana Whenua and Mana Moana relate to one another, placing good relationships at its centre. Having lashed together *vā* and *kā* as the methodology for the He Vaka Moana fellowship, ‘Ema’s linguistic and cultural knowledge gifted us a Tongan proverb, and with it a Moana-centred conceptual framework, with which to navigate our fellowship.

### **‘Pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava’**

The fellowship drew its strength from the Tongan proverb ‘Pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava’ (Wolfgramm-Foliaki & Smith, 2020a). *Pikipiki hama* means to stick, bind or link strongly to the outrigger of a *vaka moana*. *Vaevae* means to give or share and *manava* (similar to the word ‘manawa’ in Māori) is a deeply complex, core term in Pasifika expression meaning the heart, centre, womb or breath (Efi, 2003). As noted above, *pikipiki hama* speaks to the ancient Moana practice of lashing together the outrigger of canoes whilst at sea, a practice that enabled ocean travellers to swap resources, exchange information about their travels and experiences, weather and ocean conditions and sometimes even exchange crew members before unlash and continuing on their journey.

Our theorisation of *pikipiki hama* as a way to come together resists the tired and problematic trope of ‘we are all in this boat/waka together’ or ‘let’s

all paddle this *vaka/waka* together' to denote an uncritical and overly romantic idea of unity or a coming together of ideas and often cultural ways of being. Such rhetoric raises the question of whose *vaka/waka* am I being asked/coerced into, and are we really paddling in the same direction, with the same purpose, the same energy, and with a mutually agreed destination? Or indeed is getting in the 'one *vaka/waka*' a further exercise in cultural assimilation? Instead, we suggest that in coming together as Mana Whenua and Mana Moana researchers, each vessel's sovereignty is better maintained and the sharing of power and choice is better facilitated when both agree on how and for how long the vessels should be lashed together. We are interested in igniting the *vā* to activate and give energy to the potentiality that exists in the way we choose to lash together and with whom, in ways that bind and ignite the space between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana in a research context.

*Pikipiki hama* was theorised and enacted in our research fellowship as a way to bring people, projects, ideas and identities together that encouraged each entity to retain their rangatiratanga (sovereignty) while actively encouraging and creating space for productive discussion, discomfort, critique and learning to take place. In one example, one of the research fellows established a regular monthly *talanoa* (a Tongan process of sharing time space and discussion) for academic and professional staff to meet and discuss important pedagogical issues in relationship to each other (Fonua, 2020). Amongst the fellows, *pikipiki hama* took the form of monthly wānanga and regular hui to come together to write, share ideas, talk through research issues and consider the impact and implications of our collective research agenda. Importantly, our intention was to enact and enable the forming and enriching of research spaces by igniting the *vā* then fanning the flames—spaces that are all too rare for Mana Whenua and Mana Moana researchers in Higher Education.

### **Ignite the space and fan the flames**

We were encouraged to theorise a *Vā-kā* methodology thanks to a wider global movement of Indigenous resistance and reclamation that began in the 1970s

(Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2005, 2009; Thaman, 1993). Indigenous researchers, including Mana Whenua and Mana Moana scholars, sought to re-centre our beliefs and privilege our knowledge systems in an effort to “decolonize dominant research methodologies” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 31). This involved theorising our approaches as valid, robust and rigorous forms of inquiry. Mana Whenua and Mana Moana methodologies are decolonising and work to create legitimate academic space where the disenfranchised and dispossessed Indigenous peoples of the world can re-claim, re-store and re-present—seeing with their own eyes their history of colonisation (Chilisa, 2012).

Indigenous research methodologies demand space in Higher Education to view and conduct research through our lens. Mana Whenua and Mana Moana scholars (Irwin, 1994; Lee, 2008; Maua-Hodges, 2001; Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Pihama, 2001; Pohatu, 2011; Royal, 2011; L. T. Smith, 1999; Suaalii-Sauni, 2017; Thaman, 1993, 2000; Vaioleti, 2006; amongst others) encourage other Indigenous researchers to look to our own systems of knowledge and practices to develop methodologies to investigate our own problems and make visible the ways we see the world. Often activated by a politics of resistance, approaches that emerge from our knowledge systems speak back to dominant Western-centric research practices that marginalise our knowledge and ways of being. Instead of individual marginalised voices seeking to decentre hegemonic research knowledge, we seek to ignite the space between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana research work to re-centre, re-claim and re-present our knowledge as an approach to research that is both rigorous and a more adequate expression of our ways of knowing and doing. More importantly, it is work that is capable of contributing to positive transformations for our people collectively.

The ‘why’ or reason to take up Vā-kā as a research approach is straightforward—to work productively together to support change for our people. The ‘how’ is far more complex. The practical applications to chart a course using Vā-kā methodology are as vast as Te Moana itself and while practical examples such as Talanoa mentioned above are useful (see Anae, 2020; Fonua, 2020; Leenan-Young, 2020; Matapo, 2020; McClutchie, 2020 for fellowship-specific examples), we deliberately do not provide a how-to

manual—such an attempt fails to recognise our heterogenous identities and the complex contexts, people, capabilities and aspirations of our lived academic realities. Instead, we argue for *why* enhanced Mana Whenua and Mana Moana relationships are vital and encourage others to consider their own ‘how’ in their contexts based on the key tenets of productive Mana collaborations, sovereignty, and transformation that a Vā-kā methodology seeks to promote.

## **Conclusion**

Māori and Pasifika researchers must talk more to ignite the relational research space between us. It is vital, in our view, that we create the wā and nurture the vā to come together in ways that create positive transformative change for our complex and diverse communities through our research. Rather than further homogenise our diverse identities and broad decolonising agenda, we seek to ignite the space between to offer ways to talk and share ideas. Theorising a Vā-kā methodology hones in on a particular set of relationships—the relationships between Mana Whenua and Mana Moana researchers.

Theorising methodologies that examine deeply the language, beliefs and ways of being held within Mana Whenua and Mana Moana sets of knowledge is critical to address issues that we face in our contemporary lived realities from within our ways of knowing being and doing. Enabled and emboldened by Indigenous scholars who have charted, and continue to chart, the academic seascape, we forward Vā-kā methodology to encourage Indigenous Moana scholars to look to our own sets of ideas, understandings, knowledge, language and ways of being to theorise and seek transforming solutions. While Moana methodologies are becoming more visible in Higher Education, our methodologies are still confined to the margins within dominant Western scholarship. Vā-kā is our contribution of ‘one more *vaka* to the fleet’ of Indigenous and more specifically Moana methodologies, offered as an encouragement to new and emerging Moana researchers, as well as our experienced colleagues, to continue to collaborate, connect, ignite and transform.

The call to nurture relationships in the Mana Whenua–Mana Moana research space is not new, but it is more urgent than ever today. Higher Education and research continue to ignore issues of systemic racism that fail to prioritise the development, hiring, retention and promotion of Māori and Pasifika academics (McAllister et al., 2019; Naepi, 2019), but that has not prevented us from igniting Mana whenua and Moana relations in the research spaces between us. Naepi (2019, p. 220) argues that highlighting the critically low numbers of Pasifika academics can “hold government and universities accountable for their inaction against structural racism”. The time is right, and the need is urgent. We need to *pikipiki hama*, and, to quote a song on active resistance in Aotearoa/New Zealand during the 1990s, “Kia kotahi mai te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa” (“To unite as one, those of the Pacific”). We need to bring the peoples of Te Moana together, to talk and to research, to haka and to *tau’olunga*.

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