

Re Presenting and Re Searching Oceania: A Suggestion for Synthesis

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What is Research?

Research, generally described by scientists as the process of 'controlling, investigating, and predicting phenomena, like most other formal activities, continue to be dominated by western, scientific and liberal thinking. Most of you are no doubt familiar with the critical writings of intellectuals such as Memmi (1966), Fanon 1967, 1986) and Said (1978), who protest the intellectual colonization of the East by the West. Closer to home, Sykes (1989) exposes the annihilation of indigenous Australians and the on going eradication of indigenous languages, wisdom and knowledge in contemporary Australian society; while Linda Tuhiwai Smith, looking through the eyes of the colonized, interrogates western research paradigms, urging culturally appropriate practices and the conscious development of Maori and indigenous peoples as researchers.

What all these writers have in common is critical reflection of the processes whereby ways of knowing that are used in western, economically developed countries, continue to be cultivated in institutions of higher learning elsewhere and calling for a paradigm shift.

The Pacific

As you know, the region we usually refer to as "the Pacific" (or Oceania to be politically correct) is one of the most culturally diverse region on earth where different cultures with their own unique ways of knowing and understanding the world have existed for thousands of years. Much of these understandings were and continue to be unknown to Western science (such as some knowledge of traditional medicine as well as navigation) and some are making a contribution to scientific research although a lot remains to be tested and/or confirmed.

We need to remind ourselves, however, that the history and diversity of Pacific knowledges have often been compared to the recent history (only 300 years old) and limited range of knowledge represented in Western (scientific) research.

In this address I argue for the need to create a diversity of approaches to study and research that is a synthesis of Western and Pacific values and ways of knowing of Pacific peoples and their cultures. In saying this I acknowledge that contextualizing research may be viewed by some as a failure to properly problematise the cultural construction of scientific research and may

Introduction

your way objective analytic
 always doubting the truth
 until proof comes slowly
 and it hurts
 my way subjective gut feeling like
 always sure of the truth
 the proof is there waiting
 and it hurts

Thank you for inviting me to share ideas about Pacific Research, defined for my purposes as simply asking questions and investigating, in the context of the Pacific today. This morning I wish to focus on the need for Pacific researchers to develop their own research methodologies and techniques as a way of empowering not only themselves but also the people and communities with whom they work. In this I will share with you the evolution of my own ideas and development along a path, which has not only been personally liberating but also professionally rewarding. My presentation is in two parts; the first contains observations about our region and the need for Pacific peoples to re conceptualize education in general and research in particular in order to take into consideration the cultures of the people about whom research is directed; and the second is a sharing of my personal story of trying to create for myself an educational philosophy that is meaningful and relevant for my work as a Pacific educator, researcher and creative artist.

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only serve to generate more effective strategies for persuading Pacific students to adopt Western researchers' social constructions. Nevertheless, I believe that the more Pacific models and frameworks for research we can come up with the better and more beneficial would research be for the majority of our people and communities.

Pacific Research Methodology

My reasons for seeking and encouraging the development of Pacific alternative research frameworks are: i) a diversity of approaches would enable Pacific people to identify with research and thus help to empower them and build their self esteem. The mystification of research has been a major problem for many students, and offering models that they can relate does help to enhance their chances for successful learning and achievement in formal education; ii) drawing from Pacific cultural knowledge counters the criticism that much of research is divorced from reality and the message that Pacific students have been getting is that worthwhile and original research may only be carried out by palagis/pakehas; iii) the experiences, values and ideas of Pacific peoples need to form the foundation of research frameworks that can be used to investigate a wide range of topics/themes that are important for Pacific people, including the culturally constructed nature of research itself; iv) Western perspectives and frames of references have helped maintain science's position of dominance especially in the academy, and needs to be countered with more balanced, culturally inclusive approaches.

As Linda Smith points out in her definitive work, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, (in relation institutions of higher learning), Western research has established systems and forms of research governance that engender the attitudes in institutional practices that determine what counts as legitimate research and who count as legitimate researchers (Smith, 1999: 56). She goes on to suggest that Western research 'steals' knowledge from others and then uses it to benefit the people who 'stole'. In trying to create more culturally inclusive research paradigms we can try and re claim some of these stolen knowledges for the benefit of our communities and countries; and, v) debates and dialogues about alternative methods and framework for re searching Pacific people and societies offer individual Pasifika people opportunities to develop their intellectual, social and creative talents to deconstruct, re imagine and re invent themselves and their cultures, a process that has long been available to other people. This development of individual ability, in my view, must not

be lost in our re searching for our collective identities. Some of us may be frustrated at times by the expectation that we are always speaking on behalf of the cultural group to which we belong rather than simply expressing our own individual (culturally) contextualized views of the world (Smith, Burke and Ward: 2000:12).

The process of creating alternative models of learning and research is of course part of an overall process of de-colonization in our region. It is within this politics of de-colonization and the indigenous people's movement that Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes the agenda for indigenous Maori research as constituting a program as well as a set of approaches focusing on Maori. De-colonization is being articulated in different ways globally as well as in the Pacific region and is influenced largely by differences in the cultural and political histories of each place and each group of people. However, the common thread that seems to link most of what is happening in the region is the deconstruction of the colonial process as well as its basic assumptions. In 1991, for example, regional conference sponsored by

UNESCO and held in Rarotonga called for a more vigorous interrogation of Pacific schools in order to ensure schooling contributes rather

than undermine cultural development in the region. Pacific educators agreed that formal education in our region was culturally undemocratic and that Pacific peoples needed to own and control their education for the sake of improvement student performance. Since Rarotonga, there have been a few attempts by some of us to address this need as witnessed by an increasing number of research projects and higher education studies that seek to empower Pacific peoples to tell their own stories as well as to transform current educational practice. As one researcher in Australia once said, " My research is a commitment to exposing the systematic de empowering, silencing and exclusion of Nunga indigenous behavior, consciousness, culture, ideology and social formations. It is time for the Invader Dreaming to end". (Rigney J 996:vi quoted in Smith, Burke and Ward, 2000:3)

The struggle of Pacific peoples to understand themselves has been shaped both by the way they understand the world they see as well as how that world see them. Colonialism and its modern manifestation, globalization, have to a large extent, influenced the way Pacific peoples define themselves geographically as well as culturally. Here in Aotearoa, where Pacific peoples are defined and often treated as one category, it is important for the general public to understand the diversity of ways of life within Pasifika because such an awareness would help empower different Pacific

communities as well as enlighten others. Furthermore, and contrary to the common perception that Pacific peoples live in the past, Pacific people are continuing to adapt to new challenges by taking advantage of new technologies to stay connected with one another. The goods that most of them value telephones, cars, television, computers, and videos are used partly to restore and facilitate traditional knowledge and information. Pacific peoples are also taking advantage of the possibilities offered by new technologies to tackle some of their problems, and while a so called borderless world may be seen by some to foster homogeneity and uniformity some Pacific cultural groups are using the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to continually define themselves. The many sites on the WWW attest to the fact that Pacific peoples are keen to recognize their shared history, culture, language as well as religion. The Internet is being used to emphasize unique characteristics of particular Pacific identities as well as a Pan Pacific identity. Pacific people not only think of themselves as related but some are also developing understandings about who they are after considering themselves to be related. This is particularly evident in the growing interest in Pacific Studies among university students in Hawaii as well as the US mainland who have cultural links to Pacific cultures (Kiste, 2001). New technologies are also allowing Pacific people around the world to increase their profile in mainstream society without infringement of autonomy thus offering potential for greater security for indigenous values and knowledge as well as greater sharing with other indigenous peoples elsewhere while maintaining their core relationships with their own cultures.

What seems to be happening globally among Pacific people may be similar to what Morris--Suzuki's calls 'formatting'. She uses this notion to describe the development of (scientific) research in Japan where the distinction was made between global format of scientific methods, theories and taxonomies of knowledge (defined almost entirely by the West) and local content and regarded by many as important for the development of early Japanese scientific research. 'Formatting' can be adapted to meet special circumstances while retaining universal familiarity and is particularly evident in the emergence of a global indigeneity that is seen to co exist with a strong sense of indigeneity at the local level (Smith, Burke and Ward: 2000:7). This is particularly true of places where the indigenous populations are in a minority in their own

lands, such as those in Australia, Canada, the USA and of course here in New Zealand.

The need to develop new research frameworks has also been driven by the realization that there are major differences between how Pacific peoples formulate knowledge and how Westerners formulate knowledge. Western research for example dichotomises knowledge into oral/written; narrative/definitive; practical/canonical; and fluid/fixed. Reality is far more complex than that. In my experience, Pacific researchers seem more concerned with meaning and relevance than with classification and definitions. In our various conceptual analyses of Pacific indigenous educational ideas, for example, "understanding" for many Pacific students is being able to find meaning in things and knowing how to interpret and respond to them in different contexts rather than necessarily about giving a definitive representation of them as independent realities (Thaman, 1988; Merlan, 1997; Nabobo, 2000; Teairo 2000). Furthermore, in many Pacific cultures, it is important to reveal knowledge in a gradual manner and at different levels according to what is considered appropriate for the interpreter to know in a particular context. For some of us, the problem has been in how to transmit this fluidity of Pacific understandings to a public and to an Academy, whose education is grounded in written traditions.

Many of us especially those schooled in Western traditions of research have become more aware of the potential and political significance of increasing opportunities for research relating to our own countries and cultures in conducting our own research or directing the research of others.

As you know, much of what we know about Pacific people, especially their health and education, is the product of research and writing by non Pacific people. Many of us especially those schooled in Western traditions of research have become more aware of the potential and political significance of increasing opportunities for research relating to our own countries and cultures in conducting our own research or directing the research of others. More recently, there have been cases where research by outsiders have not been welcomed by the people who were the object of the research. This is probably a decision made by the people themselves in order to put off outsiders until they decide and identify the benefits they would obtain from such research. In most PICs today, a research permit is now a requirement although enforcing this rule varies from place to place. It is important that researchers themselves irrespective of where they are from adjust their methods so that communities with whom they work can and do benefit from the research. In De-colonizing Methodologies, Linda Smith provides some very useful hints about how to conduct research with communities so that they too can benefit from the results of the research.

I must admit that I am always amazed by the number of people from outside the Pacific region who continue to carry out research in the Pacific Islands. Moreover, I am concerned about how little many of these researchers know about the places and peoples who are the targets of their research. This is also true of the situation of ethnic minorities in places such as Australia and New Zealand, whose voices have been stifled by what Rowse (94:129) calls 'the currency and academic prestige of 'aboriginality,' attractive to and described by experts, who come from another culture and another class, and one wonders sometimes about how Western, middle class researchers most of whom lack cultural and linguistic understanding, could adequately represent the views and interests of economically and socially marginalized (indigenous) peoples. This is an issue that continue to be debated in many a coffee bars but my own view is that it is not so much the ethnicity of the researcher that is important as her awareness and understanding of the context and methodology of the research initiative. In some places, this issue partly addressed by the formation of different types of alliances between academic disciplines and particular cultural groups as illustrated by the **alliance between Archaeology and the Innu people of the Labrador region** (Loring and Asini, 2000), or between the University of the South Pacific Geography department and the people of Niue. Such alliances have provided much interest in and dynamism about various academic disciplines and in the case of the USP/Niue project, it has further assisted not only Niuean students but also all geography students to find more relevance and meaning in their tertiary studies.

Research as you know can be a highly political activity. Linda Smith, in eloquently describing why it is necessary to de-colonize our research methodologies, goes further to map a research agenda for indigenous peoples generally. She examines two main sites that are available for researchers, namely the 'community' and the 'academy'. She identifies different types of communities and includes those with a shared geographical space as well as those with shared objectives but who do not necessarily share a physical space, such as feminist groups, religious groups, and I would add, cultural groups. The other important site, she says, is the academy which provides opportunities for indigenous people to conduct research although this avenue usually poses some difficulties in that there is a need to be inside the institution, know the appropriate processes and procedures, and have access to research funds and opportunities (Smith, 1999:125-132).

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My experience in trying to conduct research in a university setting has not always been easy. At the University of the South Pacific the problem is not so much funding as the views of the research committee about what counts as research or who should conduct research. The idea of de-colonizing methodologies by 'inventing' new research frameworks is something new to that many key people in our institution some of whom insist that if a theoretical framework does not already exist, it cannot be valid. They ask of students difficult questions about reliability, validity, objectivity, and many of our research-based courses continue to mirror those offered by staff in Anglo American universities. As one external advisor once pointed out to me, "Most of the courses offered by some of your staff may as well be offered in my university in Toronto". De-colonizing one's research methodologies within the academy is not easy to put it mildly, and it does not get any easier with age either. My own research activities have been funded mainly by sources outside USP University (UNESCO and the Commonwealth Secretariat). Most people who make decisions about who should conduct research or what

counts as research have been schooled in Western traditions for much of their lives. In fact some of the more vocal defenders of Western research processes and structures have been Pacific islanders themselves who continue to

believe that what we do in the academy is culture free and gender neutral. As Pacific researchers we need to question the emphases that Western science places on certainty, objectivity, predictability and rationality and expose students to the strengths as well as the weaknesses of Science, particularly its inherent intellectual ethnocentrism and its intrinsic sense of superiority over other ideologies and value systems. Having said this, I do acknowledge the impact of my own Western education on the way I work and the fact that I cannot entirely divorce myself from some of the strings that attach me to the academy as well as to my own home culture. Nevertheless, I believe that we must continue to talk about these challenges, as we are doing today, through telling and sharing our stories and encouraging others to tell theirs.

A personal Story

Please allow me now to briefly share part of my personal story with you. Pacific people love to tell stories – it is what propels them to produce, create, and maintain their cultures. Story telling predates Western science and Western research, as we know them today. Our ancestors told many stories, many of which we can hear today if we are willing listen more attentively. These

stories were passed down by word of mouth, often sung and performed or fashioned as valuable objects out of the materials that were available to them at the time whether these were dwelling or meeting places, canoes or ornaments. Their stories were often passionate because they were mostly about relationships between them and nature and among themselves. Many of these stories are still within us, where their spirits live. For me, teaching, researching and writing are my ways of fashioning my own story out of their stories, mixed with the new stories that I have heard.

last night i slept curled
in a conch shell crushed
by the weight of the land
a passing breeze touched
the dew drops on the *heilala*
as i tasted its lingering fragrance
for a while
this morning i caught
a glimpse of maui
fishing for lovers' dreams
drowned in miracle music

Pacific peoples' stories have mainly been about struggle for survival. For thousands of years they strove to protect their cultures and ways of life from intruders. Today many of these stories are drowning in the din of modern, globalize culture and its scenic televised and virtual sounds forcing us many of our young people to forget and/or devalue their ancestral stories.

Long ago, as an undergraduate at Auckland University, I was exposed exclusively to the cultures that produced the stories and knowledge that were considered important to acquire and the values that underpin them. Knowledge was European knowledge and art was European art. In order to be successful at university meant hanging my stories on the trees of Albert Park and forgetting who I really was, for awhile. As for art, the only art I learned at university was the art of forgetting.

a weekend in Auckland
is good
for discovering again
old meeting places
in the park
hoping that they have stories
to tell about the adventures
of a once youthful time
down under the magnolia trees
the bench which took the weight
of our first kiss

is still there
the fountain continues to beat
like an artificial heart
and the flowers continue to die
with each passing day

and there hovering high above
is the tower clock
now dwarfed by the reality
of its own time
its striking shadow a reminder
that the heart's best defence
at this time
is forgetting
(*Thaman, 1999:36*).

Today things seem a little different. Postmodernists now tell us that there is no justification for claiming that one particular perspective or view of knowledge is a better representation of reality, or that one particular cultural perspective is more important than another. Postmodernists, as you know, reject many things including the age old scientific claims to 'objective' truth, the canons of western art and literature as well as the grand narratives of the Enlightenment. They are also critical of grand theories and images which some, including feminists, say are predominantly male, white and middle class and therefore place people of color and women in positions of oppression.

Postmodernism has great appeal for many Pacific and minority students. For me, however, there is a slight reservation. In my view, the postmodern perspective is slightly a historical since it attempts to link truth and

power by saying that social life is a continuing conflict between the dominated and dominating, and places colonialism in the centre of most debates. This conflicts with the fact that many Pacific societies and cultures have a past that predates

European colonialism; a past that is authentic and material to the well being of Pacific peoples and societies today. Pacific peoples living in a culturally diverse region have evolved pathways and new ways of adapting their cultures to their new concerns and realities. To view Pacific cultures and people through one perspective only whether postcolonial, post modern or post something else is not only anti educational but misses the point altogether.

Being one eyed and devaluing Pacific cultures and their knowledge is something that our modern education has taught us because it is an education that did not and does not take into account the way Pacific people think, feel or communicate with one another. Our higher

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education is founded on the assumptions of secularism, universalism, objectivity, equality, criticism and passionlessness the antitode of the assumptions of Pacific cultures which include spirituality, specific contexts, subjectivity, inter personal relationships, rank and authority, 'ofa/alofa/aroha and restraint. Supposedly based on merit, our modern education pretends to treat individuals equally according to so called 'objective' criteria of individual achievement that are not inclusive of the ideas and beliefs of Pacific people and their cultures. ■■■■■■

Over the past fifty years or so, most of us have come to accept the role of higher education as the means whereby our culturally diverse communities can achieve the prizes offered in society. The establishment of higher education institutions in the Pacific Islands (UPNG and LISIP in the 1960s) for example, was seen as necessary for and compatible with modern global consumer economies. However, these institutions and the staff and students within them have continued to follow models and pathways set in other, mainly metropolitan universities. More recently however, there have been calls for Pacific writers and researchers to 'reimagine' themselves, and their world. This re imagining, according to Subramani, is important because it makes Oceania not just an object of study and research but a producer of cultures of scholarship. The re--imagining involves, among other things, a reinvention of epistemologies that receive freely from the world's literatures but firmly rooted in Oceania, thus allowing for a breaking out from the distorting, deforming organization of Eurocentric historiography and projects that view the West as their centre, thus liberating our imagination (Subramani, 1999).

For me personally, the re imagining and consequent re creation and re claiming of alternative perspectives have always been part of my personal agenda ever since I decided in my early days as a high school teacher that poets did not have to be all male, white and dead. I began writing poems as a way of helping my students understand English literature and of sharing and communicating my ideas and feelings with others. In my poetry I draw from both Tongan and European traditions and utilize elements from both English and Tongan poetry. Like most Pacific artists, I am only a part owner of my work and in order to appreciate it one has to understand Pacific cultures and environments in general and Tongan culture in particular. In the following piece,

Woven Worlds, the context is personal, local and regional with the reference to voivoi a Fijian term for the processed pandanus leaves commonly used by Pacific women for weaving mats and baskets. The metaphor of weaving different material is important to me as I live and work in a multicultural context and I combine different types of art, knowledge and values to create ideas and models of understanding that are meaningful to my students and audience.

Re imagining Oceania has become a pre occupation of some staff and students at our university as well as students in universities here, Australia, Hawaii and the US mainland. It is of course an important part of the de colonization process, which began in our region in the 60s and early 70s. This does not mean that colonial attitudes have died as a result; far from it. But it means that the they are no longer tolerated because they undermine our confidence in our ability to do their own thing, to write or sing our own stories and to re imagine ourselves. As Hau'ofa says, we are now at the crossroads, and we need to work together towards the collective good. "We are the ocean" he reminds us, "we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us physically and psychologically in tiny spaces which we have resisted and from which we recently liberated ourselves".

As educators and researchers we must encourage others to re invent and re imagine themselves and their work. My own advocacy for incorporating Pacific cultural knowledge and values in formal education from pre school to university is based on my belief that intercultural understanding is predicated upon our understanding of our own cultures. I also believe that teaching about and studying Pacific cultures and understandings is an important activity in itself. In my re imagining, I have moved on from protesting the dominating and dominant paradigms to trying to create something that may be more culturally inclusive of Pacific students by drawing from the rich oral literatures of Oceania as well as the written texts of world writers and thinkers.

yesterday
i watched
your hands
weave a dream
across my memory
bringing order and texture
to that pile of voivoi

still there
filling the tale
that once was home

today
i watch
your hands
move across the page
across the canvas
across the room
releasing energy
arranging tapestries
symphonies of touch
and color

each day
we come together
to weave
feelings experiences images
to sing the songs
of our mothers and grandmothers
long continuous lines connecting
east and west
north and south
and re create
the world

In my writing, I draw from Tongan poetic symbols, such as the sea, physical landscapes as well as celestial features of sky, moon, stars and sun. In my work at USP and in my role as UNESCO Chair in teacher education and culture it is my job to draw the attention of both staff and students to the importance of Pacific cultures and the role of education in further developing and transforming them. Just as in the West, our arts, philosophies, literatures and religions are important vehicles of cultural expression hence the ways we talk, think about and communicate are influenced by our cultures as well as their standards.

I consider myself a student of culture as well as an expressive artist. In the course of my life I have experienced different cultures and different types of art forms for which I am very thankful. But if I say that I feel the same things as Europeans might feel when they see the Mona Lisa I'm deluding myself just as I do not expect them to feel *mafana* when watching a *taulolunga* or *lakalaka*. This is because canons of taste arise out of cultural conditioning and one who attempts to discuss and evaluate a production of another society or epoch is fooling herself because she can never experience the object as its creator did or as it was experienced by members of the society for whom it was made (Crowley, 1958).

As a writer and a teacher I am aware that my cultural and artistic roots lie in an oral tradition where the story

teller creates an audience in a way a writer can only imagine. But my western education taught me that a poem was a thing that was seen as separate from its creator. In my work therefore, I try to create a synthesis of the two modes to produce what some critics have called a 'third space' (Woods, 1998 allowing Homi Bhabha and Frederic Jameson), resulting in pieces that must look as well as sound good because they are to be verbalized or 'performed'. In reading a poem, I try to join together the silences of words, and hopefully make them come alive. Here in Heilala, a poem about women and literacy, education is personified using an allusion to the sacred and mythical flower of Tonga, the heilala. This flower contains allusions to history, mythology and geographic features, particularly those in western Tongatapu where the first Christian missionaries arrived and started schools.

heilala
we've waited far too long
for you to move within us
give us strength to see the scars
of those who went before us
when things did seem entirely wrong
like people born and buried
believing they've been left alone
to bleed instead of bar gaining

when long ago you came
a stranger kept apart
by distance too remote
for us to win and guard
at times your face seemed close
arriving unannounced
we knew we had no choice
but load the raft and start

we left for many places
we entered eyes still closed
yet we could feel the fragrance
a power touching those
who craved instead to ride the waves
towards the blowholes not the shore
then prayed to mau for his mana
to mend their broken oars

now it's time to move again
towards the islands far beyond
the capacity of words to name
and nurture all year long
we'll let our words prise open
hidden caverns of the dawn
and break the sullen solitude
of a sea once unknown

for we cannot let illiteracy
 again keep us apart
 mortgage our identity
 or even sell our pride
 we do not want to suffer pain
 privately at the end
 because we know deep inside
 we've only ourselves to blame
 (Thaman, 1993:11)

Conclusion

For me the research process is both an education and an art form. In fashioning Kakala, a possible framework for research about which I shall talk about later, I draw from both Western and Pacific epistemologies. Through my work in education I have been able to share my stories with Pacific educators and researchers in other fields and in sharing, we remind one another that we are Pacific, human and alive. However, it is art that gives the body soul whether the 'words' are painted, carved, sung, spoken, written, filmed

or performed. Some words need a brush; others a pen and still others movement, gesture and intonation. Art connects us to the vast ocean and to each other but it is poetry, like our cultures, that sustains and help define us if only we are willing to look, listen and learn.

you need not fear poetry
 for its mystery and secret ways
 rather you should love
 and only then will you know
 her name
 her voluptuous voice
 will wake your blood
 her touch will warm
 the air around you
 and your extended heartbeat
 will be living proof
 that my invitation
 is real

(Thaman, 1999:59)

Editors Note: References are available from the author on Request

The mother - child relationship is paradoxical and, in a sense, tragic. It requires the most intense love on the mother' side, yet this very love must help the child grow away from the mother and to become fully independent.

Erik Fromi (1900-1980)