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Talanoa moe vā: Pacific knowledge-sharing and changing sociocultural spaces during COVID-19 Ruth Faleolo

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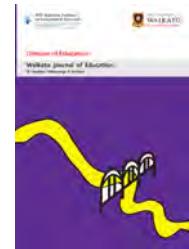
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Talanoa moe vā: Pacific knowledge-sharing and changing sociocultural spaces during COVID-19

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Abstract

This paper is a consideration of how the method/methodology of talanoa and vā, can be used online by Pacific researchers to respond to the current pandemic's effect on the traditional face-to-face physical spaces used for knowledge-sharing. The following discussion examines and explores the two concepts: talanoa and vā. It is important to understand how these research approaches work in a multi-sited research context, particularly when travel regulations and social distancing rules require Pacific researchers and their informants to keep physically apart. Virtual sociocultural spaces have become increasingly important to Pacific knowledge-sharing. As a Pacific researcher, I share my thoughts on talanoa and vā and how these concepts have been transferred online in previous research (2015–2019) and more recently, during COVID-19.

Keywords

Pacific knowledge; research method/methodology; sociocultural spaces; *talanoa*; *vā*

Positionality statement

'Oku ou tōmu 'a tuku a e fakafeta 'i kihe 'Eiki; ke langilangi 'ia pe ia!

Mālō e lelei. Ko 'eku hingoa ko Lute Faleolo. Koe taahine au a Faifekau 'Ahoia 'Ilaiū mo Faifekau Lose 'Ilaiū. 'Oku ou lele mai mei he kolo kakala ko Mu 'a 'i Tatakomotonga, 'i Tongatapu. Naaku tupu hake 'i Okalani 'Nuusila, pea toki ma'u mali o takai fala ki Haamoa 'o ma toki folau mai kihe fonuani ko Aositelelia, ke fai ha laka 'e hoko ko ha fakalakalaka kihe ma kii famili.

'Oku ou lolotonga fekumi kihe kakai Pasifika 'oku nau nofo 'i Aositelelia, ka 'oku nau kei folau fakataimi pe, mo ngaue kihe ngaahi fonua 'oku nofo 'i ai e tau kainga Tonga, hange ko Nu 'usila, 'Amelika, mo Tonga. 'Ofa ke hoko ae ngaue koeni koe tapuaki kihe kainga Tonga kotoape. 'Ofa moe lotu.

I first and foremost give praise to the Lord; may He alone be glorified!



Greetings. My name is Ruth Faleolo. I am the daughter of Pastor ‘Ahoia ‘Ilaiū and Pastor Lose ‘Ilaiū. I have originated from the village known as the ‘town of fragrance’ named Mu‘a in the area of Tatakamotonga, on Tongatapu Island. I was born and raised in Auckland, New Zealand, and then met my Samoan husband who has travelled with our children and I to where we now reside, in Australia. We came here to provide a better way of life for our family.

My current research is a study of Pacific peoples residing in Australia, yet their mobilities include temporal or long-term travel to other countries where their Tongan collectives also reside, including New Zealand, America, and Tonga. It is my desire that this research work will benefit all Tongan collectives. In love and prayers.

Dedication

For Nehemiah Thomas Faleolo (2003–2020), our beloved son, who inspired us to broaden our horizons and continues to inspire us in our reflexivity.

Introduction

The method/methodology of *talanoa* and *vā* can be used online by Pacific researchers to respond to the current pandemic’s effect on the traditional face-to-face physical spaces used for knowledge-sharing. The following discussion examines and explores the two concepts: *talanoa* and *vā*. It is important to understand how these research approaches can work in a multi-sited research context, particularly when travel regulations and social distancing rules require Pacific researchers and their informants to keep physically apart. Virtual sociocultural spaces¹ have become increasingly important to Pacific knowledge-sharing. As a Pacific researcher, I share my thoughts on *talanoa* and *vā* and how these concepts have been transferred online in previous research (2015–2019) and more recently, during COVID-19.

‘*Talanoa moe vā*’ is the Tongan phrase used in the first part of the title. This statement suggests that the two concepts of *talanoa* and *vā* are linked somehow. The following discussion explores this link with the purpose of showing how this forms an ethical way to carry out Pacific research, particularly as we move further into a sphere of online knowledge-sharing. This discussion draws from my PhD experience (2015–2019) and current post-doctoral work (2020). During my study of multi-sited trans-Tasman migrant groups in 2015, I had developed the e-*talanoa* method in response to Pacific informants’ requests to use online forums for *talanoa*.² This further set the stage for continued online research with Pacific peoples, across the globe, during the COVID-19 pandemic where it was only natural that most, if not all, Pacific informants preferred using an online forum for their knowledge-sharing. The purpose of this paper is to share a Pacific researcher’s reflexive learning journey, utilising *talanoa* and e-*talanoa* as part and parcel of *tauhi vā*,³ a research approach more commonly referred to by Pacific researchers as *vā*. It must be said, at the outset, that my work as a Pacific researcher, whether working online or face-to-face, stems from my personal understandings and experiences of maintaining sociospatial relationships; *tauhi vā*, a process that has been taught and continually re-taught to me by my mother, since my childhood, and is continually demonstrated by the Pacific peoples I have lived among, and worked alongside, over the last forty years. These life experiences of *tauhi vā* informs my practice. They have occurred in the vast contexts of my Tongan homeland, my South Auckland neighbourhoods, during my travels to extended families across Australia and the United States, and in my current extension of home, in Brisbane. The consistency of *tauhi vā* across these places speak volumes about how our Pacific people function as collectives, not restricted by the boundaries of time and space, but rather enthused to maintain these practices in between space and time.⁴ We are founded

on joint sociocultural spaces between us. These important spaces have been maintained, over the years, by *talanoa* and more recently, e-*talanoa*.

As a Pacific researcher, I have always been driven by a desire to do right by my people and to represent ‘their stories’ as accurately as possible. Growing up in South Auckland, I was always acutely aware that the statistics and media were constantly stacked against us. Why? In my mind, I understood the way things worked. Money-driven journalists during the eighties needed a good story to sell their papers, and it was easier for them to sell the poorer suburbs short than to tell their own sad stories, or even the positive truths about the local talent and amazing happenings in my neighbourhood. These experiences drive me as a researcher; the knowledge that I have about what is really going on and the fact that I could correct the statistics and re-tell our stories and truths from our people’s perspective, and with no apologies for going against the grain. I remember sitting in a symposium with some well-known Australian anthropologists and historians, hosted by Deakin University in Melbourne, a few years ago, listening to important dialogue about our Pacific peoples in Australia, and as I looked around the room, I noticed that there were only three Pacific people sitting in the room, out of the fifteen experts attending. I remember its significance because as the discussion about Pacific Islanders living in Australia ensued, I could no longer contain myself from politely nodding and listening; I started to question where their statements about my people had been drawn from, and to whom had they spoken with to gather this information. After sharing my thoughts on what I knew to be more accurate statements and redirecting the discussion to better understandings of ‘my people’, I grew frustrated. Following this, the late Tracey Banivanua Mar (a strong advocate for recording Pacific histories and narratives accurately⁵) talked with me and firmly encouraged me to ‘keep asking those big questions.’ Her words remain vivid in my memory as I write this paper; in the same vein, I encourage all Pacific researchers who seek to unveil truths in their research work that will accurately represent Pacific people and their voices. Keep asking those big questions.

Before I continue this discussion, it is important to acknowledge the work that has come before this current work. So let us revisit these important developments of the Pacific research concepts of *talanoa* and *vā*.

Talanoa moe vā

Pacific Island worldviews are largely focused on relationship-building and maintaining good social relationships. Therefore, researching within Pacific contexts requires the full engagement of the researcher during interviews and observations, seeking to understand both verbal and non-verbal language used within Pacific contexts. Anae (2016) explains the significance of undertaking research within Pacific contexts that is guided by ‘reciprocal’ respect. *Talanoa* is a preferred methodology within Pacific research contexts because it nurtures social spaces by embracing cultural protocol. Although *talanoa* is simply defined as a free-flowing conversation that involves the sharing of stories, thoughts, and feelings (Fa‘avae et al., 2016; Ioane, 2017; Vaiioleti, 2006), this way of collecting Pacific knowledge should be undertaken with a deeper understanding of the social spaces in which *talanoa* occurs and of how it is best done. For instance, when speaking with a family leader, a church leader or community leader, there are expected and respectful ways that a Pacific researcher should be dressed to address this person, provide information, and conduct the interview in a culturally appropriate way. Ka‘ili (2008) maintains that embracing ‘relationality’ in research means to apply sociospatial and other behavioural rules of relating to people, spaces and their knowledge in a culturally responsive and appropriate way. This is important to understand when researching Pacific peoples because they view reciprocal relationships as ‘social spaces’ needing to be nurtured. The concepts of *tauhi vā* (Tongan) or *teu le vā* (Samoan) in Pacific research means to ‘nurture social relations’ (Anae, 2016; Ka‘ili, 2017). Ka‘ili (2017) further suggests the significance of *vā* is in the act of ‘maintaining’ these spaces. Therefore, it is my

personal understanding that this ‘maintaining of social spaces’ should be an ongoing action within research practice. Therefore, on entering *talanoa* with Pacific, the object should be to maintain social spaces and relationships.

Halapua (2003) makes an important link between *vā* and *talanoa* by explaining that *talanoa* allows for meaningful communication built on shared obligations. In other words, participation in *talanoa* obligates researchers to not only gather information but also to provide information. The process of *talanoa* is two-way, giving and receiving knowledge. Therefore, information reciprocity in *talanoa* is essential to maintaining Pacific social spaces. *Tauhi vā* or *teu le vā* is also an important facet of participant observation. Researchers working and living within Pacific contexts should bear in mind that there are codes of speaking, dressing, and behaving that build into the maintenance of relational spaces. According to Ponton (2018, p. 3), “this Pacific methodology takes into consideration the values and beliefs required by all stakeholders”.

It is important to conduct Pacific research in a culturally responsive way (Brown 2012; Denzin et al., 2008; Walter & Andersen, 2013). Amongst other highly accredited Pacific academics, Ka‘ili (2017) advocates a continued cultural approach in research, using *talanoa*, that spans the social spaces in both Pacific homelands and Pacific diaspora contexts. Vaioleti (2003, p. 16) promotes this ‘two-way’ interviewing process of *talanoa* as a culturally responsive way of interviewing in Pacific contexts, and further defines *talanoa* as a “conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal … and interacting without a rigid framework”. According to Havea (2010, p. 14), *talanoa* “opens sacred texts and traditional values … is inviting and permissive, not just to the learned readers but also to all participants who engage one another”. Latu (2009) suggests that the only way we can ‘dig deep’ into the ‘warehouses’ and ‘libraries’ of understanding that is within the hearts and minds of Pacific people is through *talanoa*. Thus, *talanoa* is an approach that creates a *vā* or relationship between the informant and researcher whereby free-flowing dialogue occurs.

Talanoa has been widely accepted as an approach of gathering in-depth qualitative data across a range of disciplines within several Melanesian and Polynesian academic circles (Fa‘avae et al., 2016; Halapua, 2007; Ioane, 2017; Latu, 2009; Otsuka, 2006; Prescott, 2008; Vaioleti, 2003; Vaioleti, 2006; Vaka‘uta, 2009). Like a western-derived semi structured interview, the downside of using the traditional method of face-to-face *talanoa* is the actual hours required to have an ongoing and free-flowing dialogue with each informant and the need to schedule meeting times that suit the informant and researcher availability. Tunufa‘i (2016) outlines a growing concern amongst Pacific academics, that relates to the misapplication of the *talanoa* research method. Furthermore, Tunufa‘i (2016) calls for more thorough academic thought and discussion given to the etymology and meanings of indigenous methodologies utilised in Pacific research. I agree with this stance, as it will only strengthen the validity and reliability of Pacific research processes and outputs. However, when dismantling complex research constructs, one needs to proceed carefully. Often, layers of both strengths and weakness have developed over their years of conception, development, application, and re-defining; disentangling and decluttering requires purposeful thought processes. I would recommend that any method or methodological approach be used in the research field with intermittent moments of pause and reflection. The reflective practice of Pacific and non-Pacific researchers alike will ensure that the ethical essence of *talanoa*, as was originally intended by Halapua (2003, 2007) and Vaioleti (2003, 2006), will continue.

Meaningful dialogue and respectful relationships help to nurture safe relational spaces for knowledge sharing. When the *talanoa* approach is used purely as a method of gaining access to knowledge-rich spaces, the narrow motives of the researcher will be all too evident to most Pacific informants (although they may be too polite to let the researcher know this directly) and the information-gathering exercise will not be as effective in nurturing a two-way free-flow dialogue. In some cases, informants may choose not to give their honest opinions because of this built-in mistrust and disrespect shown by researchers who do not comply with the ‘unwritten rules’ of Pacific sociocultural protocols, based on reciprocity. Thus, Tunufa‘i (2016) makes a valid comment about the misconstrued uses of

talanoa and the misconceptions of *talanoa* as a methodology. However, the significance of the *talanoa* approach is that it can help to create spaces of empowerment for both the researcher and the informants if done well (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014). The realignment of researcher agendas in their use of *talanoa* will ensure that safe relational spaces for knowledge sharing are nurtured.

Tunufa'i (2016) claims that although *talanoa* remains a useful approach in Pacific research, it is lacking in philosophical rationale and processual clarity; “*Talanoa* is best regarded and used within research as a research tool or method rather than as a research methodology” (p. 238). I suggest the effectiveness of a research tool is dependent on it being in the right hands, and the effectiveness of any research methodology is dependent on the right motives at heart. Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014) promote ‘emotions and empathy’ as the essential elements in *talanoa*. I would argue that if a researcher has a deep understanding of the core Pacific cultural values of reciprocal respect—*faka'apa'apa*⁶ or *fa'aaloalo*⁷—and the skills to implement these values in ways that are both appropriate to the given cultural contexts and meaningful to the people involved, then *talanoa* can be useful as a method of building “beautiful social spaces” (Ka‘ili 2017, p. 33) as well as expanding the researcher’s and informants’ philosophical knowledge spaces through ongoing dialogue. Again, my research seeks to clarify and develop *talanoa* as a research tool and as an overarching approach based on sociocultural beliefs and principles.

Both Mafi (2018) and Pope (2017) utilised Pacific methods and methodologies, including *talanoa*, that were culturally responsive and effective in capturing the essence of what wellbeing meant to their Tongan informants. Like Mafi (2018) and Pope (2017), Enari (2019) has used the *talanoa* approach in a qualitative study of Samoans living in Brisbane. Enari’s study has used *talanoa* to capture the perceptions of *fa'a-Sāmoa* held by NZ-born Samoans living in Brisbane. Note, the use of Pacific methods and approaches does not automatically endorse a study as culturally responsive. Researchers must ensure their modus operandi is culturally, and socially respectful, driven by a reciprocity that nurtures sociocultural spaces between researchers and informants. Our methodology frames the way in which we collect, analyse and interpret data. Therefore, reflexivity will help to cultivate *tauhi vā* and *teu le vā* principles within Pacific research contexts.

Responding to the call for *talanoa vā*

The following sections are a list of my responses, as a Pacific researcher, to questions that were posed by the editors who sought contributions to the critical conversations about moving our practice as Pacific researchers online, considering the COVID-19 related impacts on research conducted with Pacific peoples.

How are ethics and engagement honoured during *talanoa* that occurs online (*e-talanoa*)? My general thought on this topical question is that it is our personal beliefs as Pacific researchers that drive our research design and practice. Ethical research carried out by Pacific researchers should aim to accurately capture Pacific people’s perspectives, experiences, and voices. Those who own the knowledge we seek and have often given freely should be empowered by our research processes, not disempowered. So ethical research, in my opinion, should promote a freedom for Pacific informants to govern how they will participate in knowledge-sharing practices; our research designs should co-create pathways to knowledge-sharing that align with informants’ and our own values and beliefs. This, however, is easier said than done. In my experience, many Pacific informants in my research work have shared similar values with me. Although, at times, some Pacific informants have not shared similar opinions and beliefs, and I have been transparent about these diverging beliefs. Importantly, the truths we seek to publish do not just set the readers free but can also set our informants free—their voices heard, and their thoughts presented accurately. This outcome should motivate us as Pacific researchers—the truth can set people free.

What does it mean to honour *vā* and practise Pacific research approaches during COVID-19 and future physical distancing requirements? *Vā* is a way of sharing knowledge. (This is reciprocal and two-way, free flowing and transparent, sometimes light-hearted, built on honesty and upon the understanding that both participants—the knowledge-gatherer and the knowledge-owner—will gain benefits from the reciprocity of dialogue in the knowledge gathering process.) It should be noted here, that often in my online dialogue—*e-talanoa*—both the informant/s and I, as the researcher, have a shared understanding that our dialogue is purposed for the ‘greater good’. Often in the times I have carried out research work with Tongans and Samoans in the diaspora communities of Australia and New Zealand, informants have shared their hopes for better outcomes for ‘our people’ through the co-cultivation of what is usually thought to be just ‘common’ knowledge in Pacific contexts yet will help to inform non-Pacific peoples about ‘us.’ The belief of many Pacific informants is that the documenting and formal recognition of their knowledge by Pacific researchers and academics may, in turn, inform policy makers, and other key decision-makers in Australia or New Zealand, who may not have heard their views otherwise. So, it is important for us Pacific researchers and academics to be aware of this inner thought and belief held by informants when they share their stories and ideas. Their knowledge-sharing was not meant for article publications and theses that would accumulate credits on our academic score boards. No, their knowledge-sharing was purposed for so much more; it was given to you/me/us who are in the position of ‘researcher’ and ‘academic’ to accurately record and represent their views and allow their voices to be heard. Let us take our research tasks more soberly now as we keep in mind that our work is ultimately for ‘others’. It would be wasted knowledge shared with us, if we are just about getting our degrees completed and our research articles published.

More recently, during pandemic times, many informants have said they are glad “someone is writing about the Pacific experience of COVID-19”, and that the “people writing about it should be Pacific” themselves. Pacific research, for Pacific, by Pacific. There is value in this research process when *vā* is honoured. So honouring *vā* in our research with Pacific informants, during COVID-19’s physical distancing requirements, requires us as Pacific researchers to firstly understand the concept of *vā*; the essence of *vā*, that forms a vital part of Pacific cultural frameworks is built on reciprocity and respect, whether it is in the physical face-to-face communication with Pacific informants or via an online forum that still allows for knowledge-sharing/knowledge-gathering to occur. The first step to honouring the sociocultural relationships between the Pacific researcher and Pacific informants is to understand the philosophy of *vā*. The second step is to understand our responsibility as researchers, to hold respectful attitudes and esteem cultural values, not only in the presence of our informants but to respect them and their knowledge in the way we share research outputs. Many times, I have heard within the Pacific community that they have become “tired of those academics who grab and run” or “the university people just come and go, and we never hear from them again”. This is both sad and true. Therefore, we need to continue the reciprocity and respect of *vā*, at all stages of our work as Pacific researchers, during our knowledge-gathering, and later stages of knowledge-analysing and knowledge-output. Respect for the knowledge-owners and respect for their knowledge is demonstrated in how we treat both the owner and the knowledge after the data gathering and analysis process, including the writing and publishing stages.

So, to speak more plainly, *vā* is something that should initially be applied to the thinking processes of the researcher; acknowledging yourself/others and your/their connections to each other. Implementing researcher knowledge of *vā* is a process of further building on the respectful connection established by introducing yourself and acknowledging the other person/s to further elaborate on the connections identified. It is important to be respectful by addressing each other, acknowledging one another, positioning ourselves in our research work and clarifying our purpose before proceeding to the knowledge-sharing and knowledge-gathering. Just as we clothe ourselves in a respectful way, when entering into a face-to-face physical *talanoa*, we ought to remember to clothe ourselves with a holistic

knowledge of who we are as Pacific researchers. This is how we prepare ourselves in a respectful way, mentally and spiritually.

Acknowledging your social spatial relationship with your Pacific informants is an important connection made by saying, “This is me; this is where I come from; this is how we are linked.” Understand the importance of introducing who you are, making genealogical links to your ancestors and origins. Village names, family names, even stories attached these two aspects of who you are is meaningful to building *vā* that will lead to fruitful *talanoa*. Your clarity about who you are will make your positionality visible to others, allowing for the deep knowledge-sharing process to begin. Once you have established this first point of *vā*, you proceed to the application of this understanding of connection to your *talanoa* or e-*talanoa*.

How should Pacific research engage researchers and informants online? With COVID-19 social restrictions increasingly impeding on traditional methods of research practice, there is a growing need to establish ethical methods of knowledge-gathering and culturally appropriate ways of carrying out research online. To find a way forward for our Pacific peoples to engage online for research purposes, we must consider the essence of what defines our research approach. This approach should be mindful of the knowledge-owners and their values, beliefs, and current uses of online platforms. There are significant considerations to be had prior to research engagement online.

As I have discovered in my recent PhD study of multi-sited Pacific groups, online engagement is a new form of communication that does not necessary do away with the tried-and-true methods of connecting and collectively progressing. Building on a shared practice of *vā* and the maintenance of important sociocultural spaces requires us to firstly engage as researchers with Pacific values and beliefs in a reflexive way. Firstly, by understanding what my own values and beliefs are as a Pacific researcher. Secondly, by understanding what my Pacific informants’ values and beliefs are. Thirdly, by understanding that these two entities may connect/clash/combine and influence both the researcher and/or researched. Fourthly, by understanding that *talanoa* is impacted by all the above and that as a Pacific researcher we often do not always see the intricacies and happenings that are noteworthy—we have become too familiar with these things as Pacific people living in the same environments as our informants. So being present, listening more than we speak. Remaining purposeful and observant of the small things can help us tell the bigger stories. I found that noting down the initial ‘small talk’, what they were cooking/eating while we spoke, what was displayed behind them while on Zoom, or their daily scheduled activities that were occurring as we spoke, was as important as the specifics about a focused topic on our e-*talanoa* agenda. These little things, often taken for granted as daily background noise, are actually significant to our knowledge-gathering. Write these down! Straight after each *talanoa* or e-*talanoa* session, write about your observations of what was happening during the dialogue and, if possible, give these back to your informants to read. They may call your bluff, or they may acknowledge your insights. Either way, their feedback is valuable and will pave the way to better understandings. Engaging in reflexive practices as a Pacific researcher will identify our thought processes, perceptions, experiences, and inner voices that influence our research approach.

What are the tensions and complexities associated with the practice of Indigenous approaches in online research? Using Pacific methods of research and Indigenous approaches online will present tensions if the approach is disrespectful and demeaning to those who own the knowledge and if the knowledge is inaccurately presented. How we respond to such tensions that may arise from the development of Pacific knowledge-sharing practices online will determine whether we keep our Pacific voices drowned out by the misinterpretations and politics of staying victimised, or whether we keep speaking loudly until our voices are heard above the noise and our shared resolve to bring forth transparent communication succeeds. In the end, we choose.

As with *talanoa*, e-*talanoa* is driven by a two-way dialogue that is ongoing. When we capture research outputs at any given point of time, we must be mindful as researchers that the dialogue has not finished. In my own research, although I stopped collecting information for my PhD officially, it was

not like I could just ‘turn off’ my communications with people that I had built a *vā* with over the four years of research work. I remember telling my supervisors at the end of the third year that I was still in communication with my collectives, both online and offline. At first, they advised me: “Let them know that your research is finished and that you will no longer require their participation.” I explained to them that it is not the way you relate with Pacific peoples, but I will post on my page a ‘thank you statement’ to bring closure and to alert all informants to the fact that the study was complete. Two years later, my supervisors were surprised to hear that I was still getting invitations to attend community events and some informants had continued to stay in touch. I informed my advisors again that once you begin building *vā*, it was usually for life. They were amazed but could see that Pacific research was a totally different ball game from what they had initially understood it to be. I too was learning that the *vā* I had built with my informants was not just about the research, it was us continuing the dialogue that ranged and diversified as the years went on.

Although we gather knowledge, process knowledge, and provide ‘snapshots’ of Pacific knowledge shared, we also understand that the dialogue online can continue, with the consent of both parties, and an understanding between both that there is still a knowledge gathering or knowledge processing happening. These objectives must remain transparent. It is a very new ball game and one that I am learning to appreciate as a more in-depth and accurate approach to longitudinal research with our people. Their stories, their time, their way. So far, they have had the control, and I have had the flexibility to select and write as well as share with them what has been produced along the way, both from my PhD study as well as the new research work that I have begun in my postdoctoral work.

Concluding thoughts

This discussion has considered how the methods/methodologies of *talanoa* and *vā* can be successfully used online by Pacific researchers to respond to the pandemic’s effect on the traditional face-to-face physical spaces used in knowledge-sharing. It is vital that as Pacific researchers, we fully comprehend the research concepts of *talanoa* and *vā* before we utilise them. Although it is evident from my own journey as a Pacific researcher that there is still much to learn and that we do not ever arrive at a point in our learning journeys as Pacific knowledge gatherers and Pacific knowledge co-cultivators where we think, “Oh yes, I have got this one sorted and there is nothing else to learn”, because such a closed mindset would be detrimental to the work that needs to be done here. It is important to understand how the concepts of *talanoa* and *vā* work together, but we must bear in mind that as our knowledge-gathering processes continue onto the virtual spaces of communication, we continually apply reflexive research practices and ask ourselves the ‘big questions’. Are our methods and approaches still fulfilling our purpose and calling as Pacific researchers? We will inevitably find that change is required. *Talanoa moe vā* will necessarily adapt to the virtual spaces where our Pacific peoples are sharing and cultivating important knowledge.

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Notes

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- ¹ Refer to Enari and Matapo (2020, p. 8) “What we have observed through various interactions in the digital space is an opening and opportunity to reconceptualise the relational vā ...”
- ² ‘*Pasifika* Trans-Tasman Migrant Perspectives of Well-Being in Australia and New Zealand’ in *Pacific Asia Inquiry*, Volume 7, Number 1, Fall 2016. 64. Faleolo (2016, p. 67): “What I term e-Talanoa was in direct response to the request of the *Pasifika* informants in both Auckland and Brisbane; e-talanoa is more suitable to their normal way of communicating online with their family and friends.”
- ³ A cultural understanding of socio-spatial maintenance that translates to my research practice.
- ⁴ *Marking Indigeneity: The Tongan Art of Sociospatial Relations*. Ka‘ili (2017, p. 38): “The social significance of tā and vā is rooted in the practice of tauhi vā”.
- ⁵ Tracey Banivanua Mar’s writings and research has uncovered truths and challenged untruths about her people’s narratives and journeys within colonial Australia. A publication that is relevant to my current research with Pacific peoples in Australia is her 2015 paper: ‘Shadowing imperial networks: Indigenous mobility and Australia’s Pacific past.’
- ⁶ *Faka‘apa‘apa* is a Tongan value of respect that takes on its meaning within the given social space or context that the attitude, language, and behaviour of faka‘apa‘apa is shown.
- ⁷ *Fa‘aaloalo* is a Samoan word for respect. The meaning of this word is embodied in the display of a respectful attitude towards people’s roles within social spaces, in the language of respect used with people of differing ranks in social spaces, and the act of culturally appropriate behaviour within a given social space or context.