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**DOORWAYS TO OTHER WORLDS:  
TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL PACIFIC S|P|ACES IN EDUCATION**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Master of Education at  
Massey University

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is an autoethnographic exploration of the processes by which my hybrid cultural identity has been constituted. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to understandings of how better to facilitate the educational success of Pacific learners in a New Zealand context. Within the methodology of autoethnography, I follow the idea of the role of the researcher as a bricoleur to guide my explorations of the processes of my hybrid cultural identity construction. I use a combination of influences including Kerouac's verse form of American Haiku as well as written and photographic mindmaps, to reflect on my embodied experiences. I have represented, through vignettes and poetry, the ways in which sensuous perspectives of scent, touch, hair, music and dance have created hybrid cultural understandings of place and space in my life. The discussions of my sensuous experiences are then explored through Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus. These concepts form the broad theoretical framework through which the educational implications of my hybrid cultural experiences are drawn out, in reference to an overriding ethic of empathy and care.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Jesus Christ, and to my beautiful parents, Robin and Marie Smith, all of whose attention and care have nourished in me, the deepest appreciation for the fullness of life.

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## INTRODUCTION

My inspiration for this thesis lies in my educational experiences of being a student, a teacher and a woman of Pacific cultural identity in New Zealand. My experiences in these areas have brought me to an understanding of what it means to succeed and achieve within different cultural contexts.

In its broadest sense, education is the means by which a people's collective way of life, their cultures and cultural identities, their ways of living in the world and of being, continues. Education, in the sense of all forms of learning and development in a positive way, is how cultures survive, flourish and grow. The noted Pacific educational researcher, Konai Thaman (2002) has defined culture as:

a way of life, a definition that...is derived from Pacific vernacular notions of 'life' as all embracing and interconnected, not easily disassociated from ideas about economy, environment, politics or indeed education itself. Culture, for me, is an all embracing framework that helps define particular ways of being and behaving, different types of knowing and knowledge, as well as different ways these are stored, communicated and shared. (Thaman, 2002, p. 25)

Sonia Nieto's (1999, p. 48) outline of culture reinforces the aspects of Thaman's definition above. Nieto delineated culture as including "content or product (*the what of culture*), process (*how it is created and transformed*), and the agents of culture (*who is responsible for creating and changing it*)". In the mainstream education system of New Zealand, however, as I will show, the cultures of Pacific Peoples have been, and continue to be, marginalized to varying degrees in all of the above aspects.

Pacific Peoples have been prevented (historically) from learning about and developing their own knowledge of cultural content, elements, aspects and products within educational systems. Systemic restriction of their cultures occurs within both mainstream education systems of Pacific nations, as well as in New Zealand, as a consequence of Pacific People's colonization. Thaman (1991, 1993) has described the alienating impact that a foreign curriculum has had on Pacific Peoples, cutting them out of a fundamental avenue for the transmission of core aspects of their cultures. She has also pointed out how they have been prevented from including their own cultural ways of knowing and learning within the pedagogy of the mainstream, and therefore, have also been prevented from fulfilling roles of cultural agency in sustaining and developing the life of their cultures. The legacy of all these factors has situated Pacific Peoples "in the lowest position in the social, economic and political hierarchy" in New Zealand (Manu'atu & Kepa, 2002, p. 9).

Referring to the socio-economic situation of Pacific nations, Benson (2002, p. 1) observed that extensive reforms over the last thirty years in different areas of the education sector, such as teacher and leadership training, curriculum revision and the upgrading of facilities, as well as large financial investments made by donor agencies and national governments, have "largely failed to provide the quality human resources to achieve developmental goals". Benson (2002, p. 1) also emphasized that deep and long lasting change and improvement within Pacific nations cannot be attained unless "the cultures of schools and systems, that is, the values and belief systems that underpin the

behaviours and actions of individuals and institutions, and the structures and processes they create, undergo fundamental changes”.

Western culture places great emphasis on a person achieving a high level of independence and autonomy in society. The British education systems established in Pacific nations and in New Zealand are modeled on similar principles and values, to which some Pacific educators have attributed the continuing ineffectiveness of Pacific Peoples’ education (see Thaman, 1998, 2008; Tongati’o, 2010). They note that (generally speaking) the cultures of Pacific Peoples have been termed as *collective* (Thaman, 2003) in that people find their place, their self-worth and value in their relationships to other people.

Thus, the worth of education in a Pacific cultural context tends to be judged by how effectively it contributes to and privileges the sustenance and enrichment of social relationships in ways that are specific and particular to each Pacific culture’s way of life. This does not mean that educational value is not judged in terms of its monetary worth, that is, by salary figures or its impact upon Pacific Peoples’ material standards of living. It means rather that these indicators of a quality, worthwhile and effective education are less of a priority than the nurturing and development of social relationships.

Traditional values of individualism are promoted, not just within formal Western schooling, but also through “the modern media, economic systems and globalization”

(Benson, 2002, p. 1). The development of Western individualism can be traced back to the Age of Enlightenment<sup>1</sup> and the rise of democracy within classical liberalism's belief in the individuation, freedom and autonomy of a human being. Within this framework democracy is a sociopolitical organizing principle through which the "state authority provides the prerequisites for the free self-determination of individuals" (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002, p. 7).

Within a more recent 'welfare' form of democracy, however, the removal of social inequalities and the creation of equal opportunities for participation in society is given equal attention. Worthwhile and valuable education, if taken in these democratic terms therefore could be measured in how far it promotes and creates ideals of equity, fairness, social justice, equal opportunity for educational participation, and whether it inspires the kind of critical reflection that encourages people to live a better life in harmony with those around them.

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<sup>1</sup> The Age of Enlightenment was a movement that was spread across Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The nature of its beliefs, the development of its philosophies, and the breadth and depth of its impact differed depending on geographical and political context. Very generally speaking, the Enlightenment developed in response to an increasing heavy handedness by the Roman Catholic Church, in regards to people's freedoms. There was no development of thought that was permitted outside of the Catholic Church and the absolute authority of royal rule. There was little or no tolerance of differences in perspective, or any other ways of knowing about the world that did not originate in the infallible existence of a Christian God. A move away from this way of thinking was facilitated by developments in science and technology, which came to be increasingly placed in opposition to faith based perspectives. Brown describes the Enlightenment as being characterized:

by more weight being given than formerly to certain values, such as toleration, freedom and reasonableness. It was associated with opposition to authoritarianism. Its rejection of an excessive emphasis on the authority of the clergy was combined with greater respect for lay opinion. In this way it is also linked with...skepticism. Confidence in the progress being made in the sciences was matched by skepticism about dogmatic ('rationalist') metaphysical systems. (Brown, 1996, p. 4)

These ideals have informed much of the development of educational policy in Pacific nations, including recent educational interventions (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002). Ideals are, however, always grounded and created in the social and cultural context of their production and the democratic ideals currently being implemented in Pacific nations have not been created within a Pacific context. In other words, they are not democratic ideals that have been created by Pacific peoples, for Pacific Peoples, grounded in their cultures, but they have been created by Western proponents of democracy such as Britain and the United States of America.

Thaman (1994, p. 7) therefore advocated that democracy has to work in the way that Pacific Peoples decide it should work, according to their cultural beliefs and values, in order to sustain, develop and improve Pacific People's lives, on the terms that they see fit for their cultures. The title of Thaman's (1994) article poses the question, "Cultural Democracy for Whom?" Western colonisation of Pacific Peoples has meant their ongoing struggle for the space both in Pacific nations and in New Zealand, in which to create meaningful democratic ideals which promote a better way of living for Pacific Peoples that, most importantly, are defined in their own cultural terms that build on, sustain and develop their own ways of knowing and living.

Thaman wrote:

for most Pacific island societies, [cultural democracy] has to do with the right and the opportunity to study and learn important elements of their own cultures in schools and universities, an opportunity denied them since schools first began in the early part of last century, because most schools were set up to transmit a foreign culture in a foreign language. Furthermore, an educational environment or policy that does not recognise the individual's right to remain identified with the *culture* and *language* of his/her group is said to be *culturally undemocratic* (Ramirez and Castaneda, 1974: 23). (Thaman, 1994, p. 5)

A further significant challenge that Pacific Peoples have faced in recent times, in terms of gaining recognition and a core place for their cultures within their formal schooling, is the increasing influence of neoliberalism in New Zealand since the election of the Fourth Labour government in 1984. Neoliberalism is becoming an increasingly widespread movement across most of the Western world and its impacts upon education are widely researched and critiqued, often lamented (see Barone, 2008) and passionately resisted (see Apple, 1999; Codd, 2005; Slatter, 2006).

Unlike classical liberalism, neoliberalism separates the individual from ethical, democratic ideals in terms of the intrinsic equality and rights of individuals and defines the individual within market principles.<sup>2</sup> It therefore ignores aspects of human life such as values, morals and ethics, and subsumes them under the ultimate authority and rule of

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<sup>2</sup>Codd has noted that "the individual within classical liberalism is 'characterised as having an autonomous human nature and can practice freedom', whereas in neoliberalism 'the state seeks to create an individual that is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur'. Moreover, whereas classical liberalism is supportive of democracy as an ethical and social ideal, neoliberalism is committed to a minimal authoritarian state that can maintain market freedom, economic efficiency, legislative effectiveness, and social order without the unpredictability and potential disruption of democratic processes"(Codd, 2005, p. 15).

the market, advocating that individuals should ultimately be left to their own choices, and to have their needs met by the economic principle of “supply and demand”.

Neoliberalism effectively assumes then, that one person has as much choice, opportunity, and power to effect change in their lives, as another. The belief is that all forms of social and cultural inequality will eventually be balanced out and alleviated by increasing the production and circulation of economic wealth. Very simply put, the greater the economic growth, the more development takes place and the better the standards of living that will eventually be available to everyone, as the money trickles down from those that have more, to those that have less, effectively raising the standards of living for all.

It is not within the purpose or the scope of this thesis to pursue an agenda against neoliberalism, and its growing danger to Pacific People’s educational futures. But it is worth mentioning that it was within my growing awareness of the impact of neoliberalism on education (in terms of how a market view of education can exacerbate issues of cultural inequity in this field) and my reflections on aspects of my life experiences, that my interest in examining how cultural identity may be linked to educational success emerged.

Although my topic and focus changed slightly along the way, what evolved is this thesis, an autoethnographic exploration of the processes by which my hybrid Pacific cultural

identity, founded in Australian, New Zealand, Scottish, Chinese, Kiribati, Fijian, and English cultures, has been constituted while living in New Zealand. The original purpose for my research, to contribute to an understanding of the implications of Pacific People's identity constructions for educational success in a New Zealand context, has remained and hopefully has been achieved.

Before explaining the structure of the thesis in the rest of this Introduction, I want to take you on a journey back in time through aspects of both my personal and academic journeys, as inseparable from each other. The discussion that follows moves along in a personal narrative style, interspersed with different types of texts that best illustrate the circumstances and formation of my topic and its methodology.

## **MY JOURNEY BACK TOWARDS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

"Kierkegaard says,  
we live forward,  
but we understand backward."

(Bochner, 1997, p. 5)

My topic has been generated out of a clash and fusion of personal and academic interests that has spanned a series of significant, largely traumatic events in my life from 2006. The significant moments of my personal and academic journey started with the death of my father, and continued with the loss of my best friend to a violent suicide, my ongoing

educational employment and Master's studies during this time. I have worked through the purpose of my role as a researcher, reconciling my personal and professional beliefs and values through the exploration of and experiments in the method of autoethnography and towards the topic of the self-study that is the centre of this thesis.

The journey begins in the midst of my father's illness, in 2006, with a journal entry I wrote the year following his death.

### **Journal Entry: London, 2007**

*His comfortable spots have all but run out now*

*He sits with his head in his hands, bent over*

*Fine browngrey soft through my fingers*

*That curl around his curled and not quite warm*

*hand*

*Crushing frustration as wide-eyed as the*

*Checkered rooms across the rooftop*

*That stare back in open gaze*

*To sticks marshmallowed in beds, among*

*Pillows rolled beneath his forehead.*

*Head up and eyes slowly follow*

*"Good girl" His soft moth eaten voice*

*and my herringbone coat,*

*a tender weave between his death and my disbelief*

*which sends me back to Edward Said*

*Tissue skinned fingers*

*Half covered ears in an attempt to block out*

*beeps*

*squeeks*

*laughter*

*the faded lime juiced beneath flamboyantly fast feet*

*Just wait, I mean, isn't there something you can do?*

*My face buried in my reader*

*The rings of my binder like the small tunnel*

*Beneath his thin and empty shirt*

*I can see 1, 2, 3 cairns*

*of little bones bridging the saddle peaks of his shoulder blades*

*Look, but don't touch,*

*Too tight and his chest pains him  
with another brutal layer of separation.*

*Mellowlit the dips and hollows of his well travelled warmth  
And quiet dignity.*

*In streams down my face,  
He continues to teach me*

In his article, "It's About Time: Narrative and the Divided Self", Bochner (1997, p. 423) describes the impact that his father's sudden passing had on the collision between his theoretical understanding (of life and) death, and how he actually experienced it when it came to pass. He discusses the conceptual disjunction and imbalance this causes:

My personal struggle after my father's death was not a scientific crisis but a moral one; and the moral questions that were raised cast a long shadow over both my personal and my academic lives. I needed to take the measure of my own life and of my father's too. How were the different parts of my life connected? What values shaped the life I wanted to live? What would my academic life be if I could bring those values into play? What would it feel like? (Bochner, 1997, p. 423)

My father had worked in education all his life and in tertiary education for the last thirty years as a senior lecturer. My physical participation in the suffering and death of my father and sharing in the grief of my mother, forced me to face up to a deep and profound disconnection between the progress of neoliberalism in New Zealand universities I had studied and watched my parent's experiencing, and the deep connection I was forging, on a new level, with my cultural identity through cultural and spiritual rituals, understandings and comprehensions of death and grieving. I was in a position in no way

sympathetic to taking the ultimate measure of my father's life and death and the contribution that he had made to hundreds of students over the decades, by his ultimate contribution to the national and global economy.<sup>3</sup> The increasing push to narrow and reduce the concept of what educational success actually was led to my first research topic in assessment, which posed the question: What are Pacific Peoples' experiences of lecturer feedback in Postgraduate courses? It was a question I later abandoned in favour of this current research topic.

When reviewing the literature, I could find nothing that justified my linking of Western culturally driven assessment types (namely formative and summative) to Pacific Peoples' cultural identities. This led me to finding a further absence of literature that made specific connections between what it was about Pacific Peoples' cultural identities, and the way they were constituted, that clashed with Western educational processes. I wondered why this was, and pondered the implications for my research topic on assessment, realizing after some time, that I could not justify why assessment in education was even an issue for Pacific Peoples, as different from it being an issue for any other ethnic minority groups in New Zealand that also faced similar histories of Western colonization. This eventually begged the question in my mind: What is a "Pacific Person"?

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<sup>3</sup> The government website: [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary\\_education/how-can-tertiary-education-deliver-better-value-to-the-economy](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/how-can-tertiary-education-deliver-better-value-to-the-economy) gives an overview of the economic indicators that are used to measure the worth and value of tertiary education and research.

Filling in the ethics form at the beginning of this year left me unconvinced as to whether or not a Pacific Person existed.

'Hmmm, am I a Pacific Person?' I was forced to ask myself.

I thought I was, even though most of the cultural (and educational) stereotypes didn't apply to me. Nieto (2010) has expressed her thoughts on receiving a humourous email with the headline "You know you're Puerto Rican when..." ..." This contained a long list of experiences and references to being Puerto Rican in the United States, such as, "being chased by your mother with a *chancleta*, or slipper in hand; always having a dinner that consists of rice and beans and some kind of meat" (Nieto, 2010, p. 10). She pointed out that "if you could prove that you had these particular experiences, you could claim to be authentic; otherwise you could not"(p. 10). Reflecting on her own daughters, she claimed that they "would have little chance of passing the "Puerto Rican Litmus test", pointing out that "their dinner was just as likely to consist of take-out Chinese or pizza as of rice and beans...and I don't remember ever chasing them with *chancleta* in hand." They eat "salmon and frog's legs and pizza and Thai food", as much as they enjoyed rice and beans and speak Spanish to varying degrees.

Reflecting on whether I would pass some kind of Pacific Island "test", I would have to conclude that I would most likely fail. I don't speak any one Pacific language fluently. Sure I failed at University in my first year, but that was mainly because I was bored and unfocused, not because I didn't feel valued by my educational institution. My interest

level in or sense of affinity with shows like Diplomatic Immunity is minimal<sup>4</sup>, and I don't like eating Corned Beef. I don't particularly like R&B and Hip Hop, am ambivalent towards Krunking and other forms of Break Dancing, preferring instead to listen to folk and rock music and I spent large amounts of my time, while growing up, in ballet training and performance. I don't live in a "pacific neighbourhood" such as Otara in South Auckland, and I certainly don't enjoy eating large amounts of root vegetables and coconut. I love to exercise and maintain a slim figure as an integral part of my diet. I don't find my 'private parts' embarrassing or laughable, nor do I enjoy the solidarity of group visits as a pre-requisite for undergoing intimate medical examinations, as Mila-Schaaf (2009, p. 3) has drawn attention to in her remarks on recent media stereotypes, "We are fat women in colourful island dresses that make jokes about our private parts and unmentionables and avoid smear testing and laugh too loud."

*Yet, why do I feel like something comes true, inside of me, every time I step off the plane in Nadi and breathe in the heavy-set air, thick with the smell of burning coconut leaves? Why do I feel more at home floating in the waters off the shores of my Mother's village, turning myself slowly in the sun, poking at the fishes that venture near me, than I do relaxing in a sunny park in the home town that I've spent all my life in? Why does getting smashed in the waves at Caloundra, walking down Elizabeth Street along Sydney's Hyde Park window shopping, and spending long summers exploring the flat red lands and vast landscapes of inner Australia, release waves of tension that build up when I am away from there?*

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/television/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=339&objectid=10560340](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/television/news/article.cfm?c_id=339&objectid=10560340)

## **Conversation in a Café, Palmerston North, February 2010**

*The background is filled with the steaming noise of the espresso coffee machine marching to the lunch orders and steady thick waves of voices. Litea and I sit over cups of hot chocolate and coffee and crumbs of sweet slices are scattered on the table.*

*I look down into my cup and scrape at the sticky sugared rim with the back of the teaspoon. I say to her: "When you read defining texts around Pacific stuff with indigenous people they always refer to us as indigenous and then within that you have to choose, or otherwise they just refer to you as half caste or multicultural." In her discussions on Puerto Rican identity, Nieto (2010, p. 10) discusses the problems of assuming that cultural identity can only be conceptualised in very particular, specific ways, arguing that, "the result of this kind of thinking is that we are left with just two alternatives: either complete adherence to one definition of identity, or total and unequivocal assimilation."*

*"So I thought", I continue, "oh I'll just have to leave the issue of having more than one cultural identity aside altogether because I just don't know what to do with myself." I shift around in my seat, feeling like a deflated welcoming balloon tied to an unfamiliar letterbox, tugged by the winds, this way and that.*

*Litea disagrees with me. "You have to tackle it", she says, "because it's where the heart of your research will come from and it's about who you are. Some people avoid it altogether. I really believe that you'll become that person at the end who can feel credible, as in, 'hey I own this information and it's stuff that I've learnt, stuff that I live with everyday, stuff that I*

*can identify with and I know what's really going on here.' Karlo (2009a) writes about how she has to negotiate her spaces everywhere she goes. You probably had that when you went to Fiji," Litea chats on, referring to Karlo Mila-Schaaf, a well-known Pacific poet. Litea's voice weaves its way through the background bubble of the café, moving vaguely past Bhabha's (1996) theories of the third space and stopping at Mila-Schaaf & Hudson's (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009a) contribution to negotiated spaces in health research with Pacific peoples.<sup>5</sup>*

*"I know", I say, involving myself in the conversation again, "To be honest with you that's what was playing on my mind this last trip, trying to get at the heart of the matter," referring to my Summer holiday in Malolo and Suva, "and then my family in Suva were like going 'Oh what's wrong with Talei? She looks really unhappy' and I wasn't unhappy at all. Everyone thought that I was miserable or something you know I was always frowning and silent most of the time. It was just because I was trying to figure out what was going on! I didn't understand! So they all thought it was some kind of spiritual presence around me and so they - so the women, you know- they all came and sat very close around me in a tight circle and they all put their hands on me"*

*I break suddenly and burst out laughing, snapped back into the confused and heightened sense of ridiculousness I felt at the time.*

---

<sup>5</sup> Mila-Schaaf & Hudson (2009a, p. 7) explain that the negotiated space provides a model for using the indigenous reference as 'base' while having the ability and freedom to draw on any or all cultural nodes of knowledge. It was originally developed to be applied to the relationship between indigenous Maori knowledge (Matauranga Maori) and Western science: "This is primarily a *conceptual* space – a junction of intersecting interests and negotiations in between different ways of knowing and meaning making. Effectively, this is a negotiated space between epistemologies"

*"It's like I'm not possessed, okay! If you just had a conversation with me you would find out pretty quickly! It's all this blimmin' research thesis' fault, if I hadn't been opened up to these ideas I probably wouldn't, you know, be in this position!"*

The cultural clash at the end of this conversation is a classic illustration of being within more than one cultural world and being of more than one cultural identity. I can quite accurately assume that the body language and gesture that I was displaying amongst my Fijian family would have been interpreted quite differently in a New Zealand context, resulting in my shock at having my behaviour interpreted as "mad". It highlights both the connection and the disjunction that can occur when different cultural perspectives encounter each other, where my behaviour is rather open to various interpretations depending on where it is that I am coming from.

The challenge of cultural hybridity in education is one which is integral to how the relationship between culture and education is currently being addressed in educational research in New Zealand. Culture is, beyond a doubt, something that is dynamic and very diverse, and Nieto (1999) has argued that what is needed in education is research that provides alternative ways of appreciating how the dynamism of culture may influence and determine learning processes. These ideas are explored throughout this thesis. The experiences that I described earlier in the conversation with Litea, indicate the current lack of space, within educational research, to consider the dynamics of hybrid Pacific cultural identity as it is constructed in different cultural contexts and in many

different ways. As I will show in Chapter One, educational research in Pacific nations has focused on exploring educational challenges from a singular or monocultural perspective, such as Samoan, Fijian, Tongan and so on. The same has tended to occur with research in New Zealand, where at best, explorations of Pacific Peoples' educational experiences that do not take a monocultural perspective, take a bi-cultural one instead, with the exception of more recent work (see Mila-Schaaf, 2010).

The challenge posed by hybridity is one that resonated for me as I thought about my research topic and approach. That is because it is very difficult for people like myself, of hybrid (ethnic<sup>6</sup> and) cultural identity, to claim enough of any one cultural identity to speak on behalf of it or any at all, when conducting research. Gegeo (2001) has written:

We Pacific Islanders are charged with losing our Indigeneity<sup>7</sup> if we live abroad or were born elsewhere ... when we Pacific Islander scholars who live abroad write about our cultures, we are criticized ... as no longer having the right to speak from

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<sup>6</sup> Allen, (2001, p. 5) in a Statistics New Zealand review of the measurement of ethnicity, states the definition of ethnicity that is used by Statistics New Zealand, in practice, as:

the ethnic group or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to'...ethnicity is seen as self-perceived and people can belong to more than one ethnic group.

An ethnic group is defined as a social group whose members have the following characteristics:

- share a sense of common origins
- claim a common and distinctive history and destiny
- possess one or more dimensions of collective cultural individuality
- feel a sense of unique collective solidarity (Smith, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Indigenous is a term that has been used in many different ways, but as used here, draws mainly on the commonalities between Battiste (2000) and Smith's (2006) explanation of the term. The term belongs to the internationalised experiences, issues, and struggles of those indigenous people who have survived European colonization which has exerted a kind of cognitive imperialism by most often characterizing indigenous peoples as primitive, backward and inferior. But both Smith (2006) and Battiste (2000) emphasise that the term is also able to be employed in a healing, transcendent and self-determining way. Working within the collective boundaries of the term Indigenous, the voices of colonized people across the world are able to network and express their issues and concerns "strategically in the international arena" (Smith, 2006, p. 7) in order to work together to "restore their inherent dignity and apply fundamental human rights to their communities" (Battiste, 2000, p. xvi)

the standpoint of our Indigenous ... identities. In a recent example, I received back the text of a chapter I was invited to write for a book on the Solomons. Everywhere in the manuscript that I had written "we Kwara'ae" an editor had written in red "But Gegeo lives in the USA." The editor obviously objected to my use of the inclusive we on the grounds that I was no longer Indigenous, as if my living in the United States had erased my identity as a Kwara'ae and Lau. (Gegeo, 2001, p. 495)

I shared a little of Gegeo's experience when I originally set out to research a topic for my Master's thesis that would position me as a Pacific researcher.

I, personally, strongly acknowledge and am very proud of my Pacific descent, but for me it is one of several cultural identities that I recognise and I live: I cannot claim any one singular, tidy allegiance, and nor do I desire to. Furthermore, the shelf-life of descriptors and hyphens used to capture cultural hybridity expire rapidly in the face of the changing social and material circumstances of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand and elsewhere overseas. Bolatagici (2004, p. 1) explains that the hyphen does little to reveal the complexities of mixed identity. Instead, "it simplifies and reduces the individual to the sum of their parts and the hyphen stands to represent a juncture; a chasm that cannot be united." This area of cultural hybridity thus became central to my thinking about the aims and purposes of my research for this thesis.

## **RESEARCH TOPIC AND THESIS FRAMEWORK**

As I considered the experiences, conversations and as I read about identity and the impacts of culture on educational experiences of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand that I have outlined, the focus of my topic became clearer and my research approach became

refined into (as stated earlier) an autoethnographic exploration of the processes by which my hybrid Pacific cultural identity has been constituted while living in New Zealand. I hope through this study and my thesis analyses and arguments, to contribute new insights into an understanding of the implications of Pacific People's identity constructions for educational success in a New Zealand context.

Chapter One is constructed in three parts. Part One explains how educational success is perceived in New Zealand and how Pacific Peoples are judged to be largely unsuccessful according to mainstream assessment statistics within the context of Neoliberalism.

Part Two examines the formation of Pacific identity within mainstream Western culture and how that has shaped the constitution of Pacific identity within education. The dominance of Western visual paradigms in identity construction is examined, in regards to the way it reinforces narrow and restrictive perspectives of Pacific identity. The potential for multisensory paradigms of perception is put forward, as a way of conceptualizing identity in alternative terms, that will hopefully provide access to more diverse understandings of Pacific identity construction, especially as it is constituted as hybrid and within different cultural contexts.

The influence that different cultural contexts have had on the way my identity has been constituted, forms the focus for the final part of Chapter One, which briefly outlines Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus. These two

concepts have influenced my interpretation of the impact of different social and cultural contexts on my family's cultural identity and especially the impact of cultural rejection and my consideration of the educational implications of my study.

Chapter Two is written in two sections which examine the methodology of autoethnography and the creation of my research method. The first section provides an overview of autoethnography, its definitions, relationship to ethnography, purpose and suitability for research with Pacific Peoples. The second section of the chapter provides a discussion of my particular method of autoethnography. It introduces the framework of embodiment through which I have explored my identity and explains how I have drawn on a range of elements from my personal life, including poetry, music and photographs, examples of which are presented in this chapter.

Then in Chapter Three I present and explain my self study. This chapter is written in three parts. Part One starts with an overview of my grandfather's life on Kiribati, then traces my grandparent's physical, social and cultural journeys between Kiribati, Makogai, Levuka and the continuation of their journey, through my parents, across Australia and New Zealand. Part Two presents my experiences of Scent and Hair, while Dance and Music are the focus of Part Three. My understandings of place and space, as they have been and are formed through sensuous experiences are delineated within a series of

vignettes and interpretations that cover, in varying depths, scent, touch, body shape, appearance, and sound – in particular, harmony.

Chapter Four draws out the implications of my explorations of my hybrid cultural identity formation for Pacific People's educational success in a New Zealand context using Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus. I explore how I have activated this cultural capital in my life and some of the conditions that need to be present in order to employ cultural capital effectively in a Western education system.

The Conclusion follows Chapter Four, in which the limitations of my study are described, both in its methodology and scope. I suggest some ideas towards making change in the classroom and pose additional directions in which research could be carried out.

A final note is needed on the terminology used in this thesis. Terms such as *Western* and *Pacific* are highly contested. Both terms are names which have ended up turning into things – into false models of reality (Wolf, 1982) which are used to guide practical explorations of where issues lie in education. Neither group - of Pacific Peoples nor Westerners - is by any means homogeneous or discrete from one another. Westerners in New Zealand or New Zealand European people are often referred to in the vernacular form as *Pākehā* or *Palagi* in Pacific research but I prefer the term, New Zealand European, because the languages of the vernacular terms have never been mine.

I have used these terms (Pacific Peoples, Western/ers, New Zealand European) wherever I make generalizations that have been previously documented. I have tried to avoid using these terms where I can make more specific reference to the cultural influences I am discussing in order to clarify and deepen an appreciation of the diversity of identity.

# **CHAPTER ONE:**

## **PACIFIC PEOPLES, EDUCATION AND IDENTITY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term *Pacific People* has been used synonymously with *Pacific Nations People*, *tangata pasifika*, *tagata pasefika*, *Pasefika people* and *Pacific Islanders* and is used to refer to the seven Pacific national categories in the New Zealand census<sup>8</sup>, those people of Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Fijian, Tokelauan, Niuean and Tuvaluan descent.

Growing up in Palmerston North in the 1980s I was lucky enough not to experience much overt discrimination in my lifetime. I was mainly protected by the middle-class position of my parents, which immediately set me apart from how most Pacific People were viewed at that time, especially when I was at primary school. As I grew older though, I became aware that my positive experience of my cultural identity was not the prevailing one of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand, who have faced discrimination since the 1960s, being referred to in the New Zealand vernacular as “overstayers”, ‘coconuts’, ‘bungas’ and ‘fresh off the boat (FOB)’” (Loto et al., 2006, p. 102). Negative attitudes towards Pacific people are not the sole preserve of white people in New Zealand either. “It has been over two decades since a Maori nationalist declared that Pacific Islanders should ‘fuck off’ despite Maori and Pacific intermarriage and common socio-economic

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/about-2006-census/pacific-profiles-2006.aspx>

challenges [but] Maori tolerance for Pacific People's demands for a share of the New Zealand Pie understandably wears thin at times" (Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005, p. 211)

Given this social environment it is arguably unsurprising that that Pacific Peoples are underachieving within mainstream educational indices. This chapter will explore and critique this situation. In Part One Ministry of Education findings are presented, in regards to where it is that Pacific Peoples are achieving, particularly in comparison to New Zealand Europeans. This is then contrasted with the perspective taken by Pacific educational researchers.

In Part Two, I describe the ways in which Pacific People's cultural identities have been constructed in social and educational contexts, and how this has impacted on how the relationship between culture and educational success is perceived in the mainstream. I propose an alternative perspective of Pacific cultural identity, one that is multisensory and which draws on different dimensions of perception.

## PART ONE: EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

*Opening up my Firefox Internet Browser and tapping "Pacific educational achievement nz"<sup>9</sup> into the Google search bar yields a page of results within about three seconds, results that were filled with the following fragments of key words and phrases that the search engine had picked up on: "...Low achievement in literacy and numeracy leads to many Pacific students leaving school with no..."; "... Low education achievement is more common in the growing*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://tiny.cc/6brgq>

*Māori and Pacific ...”; “In addition, more than 80 percent of Māori and 70 percent of Pacific tertiary study is at sub-degree level.”; “... aims to address New Zealand’s comparatively high rate of educational inequality with Māori and Pacific Island students”; “Groups that are disproportionately represented at low levels of achievement are Maori, Pacific and male students”; “Pacific students are also over-represented among students who leave school with no qualifications (comprising six to seven percent of all school leavers, but between nine and ten percent of all school leavers with no qualifications)<sup>10</sup>; “... Poor literacy was also found to be concentrated within the Pacific Islands...”*

***Whew! What's going on here? Why are Pacific Peoples being represented in such a way? And so prolifically? And by whom and why? What does the literature say?***

Reviewing the educational research available, through the ERIC, JSTOR and Google Scholar databases, and scouring the reference lists of journal articles, PhD and Masters' theses, it was not difficult to find numerous relevant national government reports and quantitative and qualitative studies that compared Pacific People's underachievement to other ethnic groups in New Zealand. These sources of information, a selection of which I examine in the next section, more or less concurred that the greatest educational gap between Pacific Peoples and other ethnic groups, existed between the overall achievement levels of Pacific Peoples and that of New Zealand Europeans.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.hrc.co.nz/report/chapters/chapter15/education03.html>

Educational achievement in New Zealand is most commonly taken in regards to Pacific Peoples' performance in comparison to other ethnic minority groups and New Zealand Europeans, in the following areas of: numeracy and literacy, level of study, rate of attrition, rate of course completion (both pass rates and the time taken to complete), level of achievement within courses, levels of courses being undertaken (certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate), areas of study, and the level at which Pacific Peoples enter employment after compulsory education and post-compulsory education has ended.

## **Western Perspectives of Pacific Education**

The overwhelming view of Pacific Peoples in the New Zealand education system is one of underachievement. For example, the executive summary of the 2006 report *Pasifika Achievement: Engagement and Choice* (Harkess, Murray, Parkin, & Dalgety, 2005, p. 4) opens with findings that are supported by other studies (see Wensvoort, 2009; Wensvoort, 2010), that the tertiary enrolments of Pasifika students are significantly lower than other groups, they are less likely than other students to gain secondary school NCEA in a timely fashion, and less likely to gain University entrance at all. While it is also reported that there is some progress being made in terms of the overall enrollment levels of Pacific Peoples in tertiary level qualifications, despite small gains, they continue to be situated "at the bottom end" in terms of their enrolment numbers and achievement levels (see Wensvoort, 2010).

Other studies support and reinforce the observation of a lack of a place for Pacific Peoples in New Zealand's mainstream education system (see, for example, Nakhid, 2003; Nash, 2000). In response to this situation, the government has developed interventions and action plans (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2009) to target areas of the education system in which problems (and their corresponding solutions) are seen to lie. These action plans focus on targeting the areas in which Pacific Peoples are falling behind other groups, such as rates of numeracy and literacy in primary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2009) and gaining university entrance in NCEA. The aim is to close the gaps between Pacific Peoples and other groups, by bringing them up to the standard of New Zealand Europeans. *Education and Pacific Peoples in New Zealand: Pacific Progress 2010* (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010) provides a particularly good overview of how Pacific People's underachievement is perceived in the mainstream education system, a snapshot of which can be explored here.

The report's executive summary provides an overview of the Early Childhood Education (ECE), Schooling and Tertiary Education sectors. While the summary begins by acknowledging the importance of Pacific culture to their educational success, it is not presented as being essential and indeed it is seen as an accessory, or as a barrier, rather than an asset. For example, it is stated that "Cultural appropriateness and cultural connections in ECE" are sidelined as being "*also* very important for Pacific families" rather than being indispensable, and at the core of ECE for Pacific families (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010, p. 10).

Although the report acknowledges that “Pacific parents think educational outcomes are the most important outcomes from participating in ECE”, many Pacific ECE services are criticized as they do not “adequately extend children’s thinking or support questioning” (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010, p. 10). What seems to be implied is that the cultural inadequacies of Pacific children are brought to the fore as the reason for their underachievement across all levels of schooling.

In contrast, in its comments of Tertiary Education, the report places responsibility on the tertiary institutions rather than on Pacific students for their low participation and achievement levels. It states “only half of tertiary education organizations reported that they were developing relationships with Pacific communities [in wider society].” Most of these were focused on attracting more Pacific students and few on understanding and addressing the needs and aspirations of the community” (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010, p. 12). This is understandable given that New Zealand universities are being subjected to increasingly market driven and competitive funding models, where the needs and aspirations of a community are necessarily of lower priority than gaining student “clients”. This begs the question of why, in a neoliberal environment, should community educational needs and aspirations be the responsibility of a tertiary institution at all, when the neoliberal structure and philosophy of the education system, its core values and beliefs, promotes the opposite view, that individuals should have autonomy of choice in these matters.

The tensions and contradictions briefly illustrated in this discussion of the Report's executive summary indicate that the cultures of Pacific Peoples are not perceived as being advantageous, but rather, as being an obstruction to their educational success. In effect, the prevailing perspective on Pacific educational underachievement is one of cultural deficit, a process tantamount to blaming the victim (Valencia, 1997, p. x)<sup>11</sup>, which impacts upon the opportunities available to Pacific Peoples to better understand how their cultural identities can enable them to succeed in mainstream education.

There is some support within Pacific educational research for front line interventions that attempt to create spaces within which Pacific cultural identity can valued and appreciated as a fundamental avenue towards educational success. Benseman, Coxon, Anderson and Anae (2006, p. 147) state that retaining Pacific students within tertiary education institutions is "a function of the interface between student and institution, and the institution and the community". Supporting academic success through the provision of mentoring (D. Mara & Marsters, 2009), the creation of Pacific educational strategies (Durie, Tu'itahi, & Finau, 2007) or the accommodations made for Pacific peoples within university strategies (Auckland University of Technology, 2008-2010; Victoria

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Valencia discussed deficit thinking, explaining that "the blame for the problem or injury is located – by the more powerful party – in the individual person, the victim, rather than in the structural problems of the unit...*there is a shift of blame from structural defects...to the alleged disregard, faults and carelessness of the parties, who claim exculpation [sic]*" (Valencia, 1997, p. x)

University, 2011) and particular projects such as Starpath<sup>12</sup> are valuable interventions that can open up a greater place for Pacific Peoples within the mainstream.

The question of change for Pacific Peoples is more complex, however, than addressing problems through front-line educational services. Considering where it is that the authority (and responsibility) for change is located is essentially to consider issues of agency<sup>13</sup> – that is, to consider where the power and capacity of a person to effect change lies, and the circumstances that aid or prevent this. The issue of Pacific Peoples' agency in education in New Zealand requires a more in-depth consideration of the historical social and cultural contexts from which their agency and their education are inseparable, than that which are currently provided for in government reports.

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<sup>12</sup> Starpath is a Partnership for Excellence led by The University of Auckland in partnership with the New Zealand Government. It aims to address New Zealand's comparatively high rate of educational inequality with Māori and Pacific Island students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds showing significant rates of educational under-achievement compared with their peers.

(<http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/about/research/starpath-home>)

<sup>13</sup> Agency is described by Anthony Giddens (1984) as being the basic relation between action and power: "To be able to 'act otherwise' means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference', that is, to exercise some sort of power" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14).

## Pacific Perspectives of Educational Success

A deep recognition of the core importance of cultural context to educational success underpins the majority of Pacific educational research<sup>14</sup> both in New Zealand and in Pacific nations. Frederick Erickson (2010, p. 35) stated that “in a sense everything in education relates to culture – to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention”, describing culture as that which structures the “ ‘default’ conditions of being human.”

Culture shapes and is shaped by the learning and teaching that happen during the practical conduct of daily life and within all the educational settings we encounter as learning environments throughout the human life span – in families, in school classrooms, in community settings, and in the workplace...we continue to learn new culture until we die....every moment in the conduct of educational practice, cultural issues and choices are at stake. (Erickson, 2010, p. 36)

Erickson’s viewpoint is one that underpins much of the educational research with Pacific Peoples that takes culture to be at the core of the challenges facing their educational achievement in their Pacific homelands and in New Zealand.

Educational research in Pacific nations has increasingly recognised and criticized the ideological<sup>15</sup> domination that has occurred in Pacific nations since the earliest

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<sup>14</sup> Pacific educational research refers to educational research undertaken by Pacific Peoples with Pacific Peoples. It refers to those who are of Pacific descent as well as those who are non-Pacific that work in a partnership with other Pacific researchers.

<sup>15</sup> As the term ideology is used here by Thaman, it can be taken to refer to “the set of beliefs, attitudes, opinions, symbols and ideas about social reality which are tightly or loosely related” (O’Neill, 1998, p. 29). Anne-Marie O’Neill further explains ideology as it is used in three important senses:

It refers to specific kinds of beliefs, it also refers to beliefs which are in some way distorted and it refers to wider assumptions or sets of beliefs or discourses covering all aspects of our existence – everything from scientific knowledge, religion, personal conduct, the political system or our historical foundations as a nation, irrespective of whether they are true or false. Ideologies are frequently located in particular social groups and fulfil functions for these groups. They defend, justify or further their interests. In this way ideology has an external function for the group and it may have an internal

colonization of the Pacific region. Benson and others (see Anae, 2000; Tongati'o, 2010)

have framed the issue "as a lack of ownership" (2002, p. 2), stating that:

"Education remains an alien process and is viewed by Pacific peoples as something that is imposed from outside: an instrument designed to fail, exclude and marginalize the majority and therefore irrelevant and meaningless to their way of life." (Benson, 2002, p. 2)

It has been argued that restoring the cultures of Pacific Peoples to the heart of their political and social infrastructure is the first and most essential step to educational transformation from which all other actions should flow. These are actions that include the envisioning, planning and implementation of strategies for transformation that combine both local and global considerations and needs (Puamau, 2006, p. 21).

Restoring culture to the education system in Pacific nations has been the focus of research that targets specific areas such as the curriculum, Pacific languages, and teacher training systems. Thaman has been one of the earliest proponents of curriculum review in Tonga, along with Priscilla Puamau (2002) in Fiji and Tanya Wendt Samu (2008) in New Zealand. Thaman (1993) wrote, "the history of formal education is evidence of the fact that the dominant ideologies and cultures upon which the school curriculum were based were foreign to the majority of island pupils" (p. 250).

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function in helping to hold the group together. Thus all social groups are constituted by and through ideology.

Pacific Peoples have been faced with struggles against dominant Western ideologies in mainstream education in New Zealand, and in the educational institutions and structures that maintain these ideologies within Pacific societies, through the maintenance of Pacific People's dependence on foreign aid for educational resourcing.

The foreignness that Thaman refers to is the alien knowledge and knowledge construction processes, which includes English<sup>16</sup> as the language of instruction that has been imported through a Western education system. The disconnect between knowledge construction within Pacific cultures and that within Western culture is highlighted as being a key contributing factor to the fragmentation of Pacific People's identity in the education system (1999). For example, some comparisons have been made by Unaisi Nabobo (2009) and Vaine Mokoroa (2009) between knowledge (what it is, how it is formed), as it is meaningful within Fijian and Cook Island culture, and knowledge that is meaningful within formal mainstream schooling, especially as it relates to what kind of ideals Western culture and Pacific cultures promote through education. There is a strong recognition that the kind of knowledge that is promoted by Western culture is individually oriented, and focused more on enabling the individual person to succeed in life, regardless of whether or not it is useful to the community and the maintenance and development of social relationships. Nabobo (2009) stated: "unlike recognised school knowledge, knowing in the Fijian indigenous education context is appreciated and respected only if it can be usefully applied in the community". Similarly, Mokoroa (2009) has pointed out the discrepancies of knowledge as it is applied and meaningful within the community in Atiu, an island in the Cook Islands, and how it is valued within school. "In Atiu", Mokoroa stated, "knowledge is seen as necessary to promoting unity in

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<sup>16</sup> The recent cuts to funding which support resourcing in this area have come under strong criticism from Dr Sitaleki Finau<sup>16</sup>. Dr Finau writes: "This new National Party Minister appears unconvinced [by research which supports the integral value of Pacific languages to learning]...and wants to know how to raise Pacific student's academic achievements without having to teach any part of the NZ Curriculum through Pacific languages." <http://leap.tki.org.nz/Pasifika-languages-in-schools>

society." Furthermore, "there is a feeling among some Atiuans that modern education is promoting individualism and is slowly working to erode the unity that was once a major characteristic of Atuan people" (Mokoroa, 2009, p. 83).

The unsuitability of the content and structure of the curriculum in Pacific nations, and the disconnection between schooling knowledge and cultural knowledge, has produced the challenge of training Pacific teachers to teach 'foreign ideas' and in a way which is culturally relevant. Teacher training is explored by Makafalani Tatafu, Edward Booth and Michael Wilson (1997) who consider the implications of this for attrition rates in Tongan secondary schools. A lack of a teacher training programme which emphasises the centrality of love and care for students in the context of Tongan culture has been highlighted as a strong contributor to students leaving school early.

Thaman (2001, p. 7) has stated that "the main bridge [between Pacific cultures and formal education] must be the teacher". While this is not the only solution to the gap between formal schooling and Pacific Peoples' culture, attention still needs to be focused on those "who prepare teachers in our colleges and higher education institutions" in ways that can help them to contribute towards the development of "a new pedagogy based on Pacific values, beliefs and knowledge systems that incorporate Pacific styles of learning and ways of knowing"(2001, p. 6). In order to achieve this it is therefore important that there be a "reorient[ation in] in teacher education and training in order to

ensure that all teachers are competent in, and have a deep understanding of, as many Pacific languages and cultures as possible" (2001, p. 6).

Pacific educational research has increasingly focused on the importance of culture to Pacific Peoples' educational success. In addition, there has been a growing emphasis on how Pacific educational research methodologies can assist towards identifying more effective ways of enabling Pacific Peoples to succeed in a Western education system (see Anae, 2000; Anae, 2010; Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt - Samu, & Finau, 2001).

There is work also being undertaken in the field of Pacific epistemologies<sup>17</sup>, ethnic-specific Pacific cultural identity construction (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; St Christian, 1994) and various forms of identity within that, such as that of fa'afafine (Alo, 2006). However, research which makes specific connections between Pacific cultural identity constructions and specific Western educational processes has yet to be undertaken and I hope that this thesis can contribute within this field.

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<sup>17</sup> In his keynote address, David Welchman Gegeo (2006, p. 5) has outlined Pacific indigenous epistemologies (PIE) as comprising the following features:

- Ways of constructing or theorizing knowledge 'rooted' in and 'unique' to a Pacific Island indigenous culture
- Communal, dialogic and situated
- Practice-oriented
- Rationalism (reason) and empiricism (experience) inextricably connected and thus mutually informing each other
- Give sense: sight, touch, hearing, smell, taste
- Memory, reflection, introspection
- Dream, revelation, intuition, telepathy

#### Highly Embodied

The whole body (both the physical and the metaphysical is involved in knowledge construction

The next section, Part Two, examines the influences, currently circulating in New Zealand society, that are shaping perceptions of the cultural identity of Pacific Peoples. The educational implications of Pacific Peoples' cultural identity constructions are explored and an alternative perspective is proposed, which aims to open up opportunities to conceptualise Pacific identity in a broader way than that currently available in educational research, in order to then conceptualise avenues to Pacific educational success in broader terms.

## PART TWO: PACIFIC PEOPLE'S IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS

*Marching along in the freezing Palmerston North winds, I scratch a little at the charcoal smeared onto my cheeks. In front, beside and behind me are my relatives, singing together against the chilling wind that whips their voices from them and silences them in the spaces between us and the crowd gathered by the side of the road to watch us exhibiting our cultural identities, one by one, as we parade in a long line down the middle of Broadway.*

*It is The Festival of Cultures and I have once again been asked to represent the Fijian community to...well, to everyone else. As usual, I feel nonplussed about the whole thing. I don't mind that people come and stare, it's kind of nice to be stared at as an object of interest and fascination for one day of the year, and the feeling of being different from those looking on, is a source of pride for me. It reinforces an increasingly latent but abiding sense of*

*difference for me, which I find to be a source of comfort, my strongest way of understanding who I am.*

Although it's been a long time since I've paraded my Fijian culture before the general New Zealand public, I look around and realize that Pacific Peoples are always on parade, not just on days like The Festival of Cultures. Pacific Peoples' cultural identities are paraded on hospitality and tourism marketing materials, university graduation stages, strategies and investment plans, on central government education plans and reports and websites, on resources and materials offered to support Pacific Peoples' learning.

Visual images and symbols do provide some starting points for a consideration of what Pacific culture and cultural identity is. But visual dominance crowds out opportunities for Pacific People's identity to be conceptualized in ways other than those from a Western emphasis on sight which equates seeing (or what's on the outside), with knowing.

In this section I examine the constructions and impacts of visual perceptions of Pacific People's cultural identities and how that has affected the way their cultures have been approached and understood in educational research, particularly as it applies to Pacific educational metaphors. Constance Classen (1993, p. 137) states, "when cultures are approached on their own sensory terms rather than through the paradigms dictated for them by the West, what we discover are not world-views ... but worlds of sense".

## **Seeing is Believing – Identity Constructions of Pacific Peoples**

Cultural identity is a phenomenon which incorporates an extensive range of influences and includes a person's personal, social and political circumstances. In New Zealand society, Pacific People's cultural identity has been constituted within a process of 'Othering'<sup>18</sup>, where their values, beliefs, and aspirations are defined and devalued in relation to the dominant culture's.

Hall (1996, p. 4) explains that identities are constructed through, not outside, difference: "it is only in relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks ... that the positive meaning of any term – and thus its identity – can be constructed". The presence of other cultures creates the necessary forces, the tensions required that arise out of differences between cultures that form their discrete identities. The power dynamics, the vying for and claiming of space, shapes identities in relation to each other.

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<sup>18</sup> The process of 'Othering' draws upon Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, an ethnocentric process by which cultural identities are created for a culture (on behalf of it) by the West. Orientalism was a field of study within which 'the Orient' (that which was 'Other' than the West) was studied and interpreted – its "civilizations, peoples, and localities" (Said, 2007, p. 45). Orientalism describes the social, cultural and political forces, and the strategies, which acted to bring the Orient into Western learning and consciousness, through a series of 'things' or essential aspects by which the Orient could be recognised and known, which did not necessarily bear close relation to a 'real' Orient. These were aspects such as the "Oriental character, Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like". Said stated, "the "Orient was a word which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings, associations and connotations...these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient but to the field surrounding the word" (Said, 2007, p. 46).

In whatever way the Orient was defined, it was always in a negative way, as something that was different from and of lesser stature than the West, the Orient being politically weaker than the West. Said further stated that "Orientalism depends for its strategy on [a] flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand" (Said, 2006, p. 26)

Identities are constituted by social and cultural perspectives which, themselves, are shaped and influenced by constructions of identity. This two-way relationship means that considering Pacific People's identity constructions means considering the perspectives, and the social and cultural forces, that have constituted those perspectives. Forming a perspective is a sensory, social and cultural act in that it requires a living involvement in the physical world, and a social and cultural way of constructing meaning from that – a way or a manner of being.

Any particular kind of perspective depends upon the interaction of social, cultural and physical realities, as Classen (1997, p. 401) has stated:

sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell are not only means of apprehending physical phenomena, but also avenues for the transmission of cultural values. Here we refer to such characteristic modes of sensory communication as speech and writing, music and visual arts, and also to the range of values and ideas which may be conveyed through olfactory, gustatory and tactile sensations.

The perspective from which Pacific identity has been constituted in New Zealand has mostly been a visual one. Visual symbols of the 'Pacific', coined by the mass media, are used to create pervasive feelings of collective ownership of a fixed Pan-Pacific identity throughout society, which is easier to market than diverse and differentiated Pacific identities. The predominance of sight is linked to the scientific paradigms that arose during the Enlightenment, as part of the revolt against the monopoly of knowledge that was held by the Catholic church and royalty<sup>19</sup> during The Dark Ages, where knowledge

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<sup>19</sup> "Sight is held to be the most important of the senses", emphasised Classen, "and the sense most closely allied with reason". Classen has described how this "bias in favour of sight" can be traced back to ancient philosophy and Aristotle who "considered sight to be the most highly developed of the senses". The cultural significance of

was kept hidden and ‘revealed’ only by the privileged few. The increasing privilege given over to scientific perspectives, and sight-based ways of knowing, have enabled the rise of an eye-minded rational world view, which is evident in educational and health research with Pacific Peoples (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009a, 2009b).

The media has been one of, if not the strongest, proponent of a visual identity for Pacific Peoples through the mass production of images, a phenomenon which dates back to the widespread availability and popularity of cameras. The proliferation of images contributed to the ushering in of a consumer oriented age, preceded by industrialism. In his article, “Hyperesthesia, or the Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism”, David Howes (2005a, p. 285) stated: “The mass production of images, which occurred in the 1800s, thus complemented the mass production of styled goods or imitations. With this proliferation of images and imitations appearance increasingly came to overshadow – and even obliterate – substance.”

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sight is related to the The Age of Enlightenment describes in the Introduction, where an increasing prestige was attached to science as a way of freeing thought from the clutches of Catholic Church and royalty.

Classen has stated:

The enquiring and penetrating gaze of the scientist became the metaphor for the acquisition of knowledge at this time (Foucault, 1973; Le Breton, 1990). Evolutionary theories propounded by prominent figures such as Charles Darwin and later Sigmund Freud, supported the elevation of sight by decreeing vision to be the sense of civilization. The ‘lower’, ‘animal’ senses of smell, touch and taste, by contrast supposedly lost importance as ‘man’ climbed up the evolutionary ladder. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the role of sight in Western society was further enlarged by the development of such highly influential visual technologies as photography and cinema (Jay 1993; Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994, pp. 88-92). (Classen, 1997, p. 402)

Advertisements by hotel and tourism companies offering ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ wedding packages, underneath frangipani-laden, palm entwined arches on the beaches (see Figure 1.) and images of resorts perched on ecologically fragile atolls are designed to evoke visually similar locations anywhere from Malta to Samoa to Hawaii. In so doing, any cultural connectivity between the land and Pacific People’s unique and diverse identities is sterilized as the mass media relentlessly seeks to produce an identity which - like itself - is mediated “by the market, not rooted in place, tradition or locality” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 9).

The competitive neoliberal environments of New Zealand universities mean that they are charged with reaching a wider and wider customer base. Consequently, it is necessary to incorporate Pacific Peoples and market (to) them as effectively as possible. Stylized Pacific representations of otherwise extremely diverse flora and fauna, that is flowers or blossoms (see Figure 2 and 3), plant life, sea-life, shells, boats, fishing nets and so on are employed to represent and create *en masse* a collective, reproducible, and commoditized Pan-Pacific identity where “[C]ommodities come to serve as representations of identities” (Ram, 2004, p. 27).

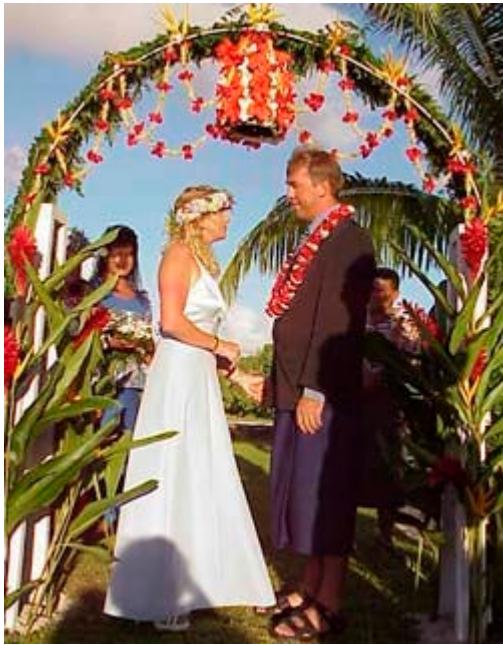


Figure 1 Honeymoon & Wedding Special for: Coconuts Beach Club

(<http://tinyurl.com/4d6bwzs>)



Figure 2 Image on front cover of *Pasifika@Massey Strategy*

(Durie, et al., 2007)



Figure 3 Image on front cover of *Pasifika Education Plan: Monitoring Report 2008*

(Ministry of Education, 2009)

In New Zealand, the media have marginalized the diversity of Pacific Peoples, generating a mass culture that has severely impacted upon how it is that Pacific People's cultural identities are conceptualised in education and that are evident, for example, in strategic educational metaphors. The use of metaphor within educational theory and research has long held substantial pedagogical value because of its "potential to transfer learning and understanding from what is known to what is less well-known and to do so in a very vivid manner"(Ortony, 1975, p. 53).

A popular use of metaphor within education has been to illustrate and highlight cross cultural intersections between Western and Non-Western research methods. When used in this way, metaphors can help open up spaces for other cultural perceptions at the centre of the research process, while still maintaining connections with Western ways of seeing and understanding. Bishop (1999) described the Kaupapa Maori research strategy of whakawhanaungatanga - a core cultural guiding concept around which aspects of the research process are organized and in relation to which they gain their meaning.

Whakawhanaungatanga uses the constitutive metaphorical concepts of whanau (extended family) to understand the notion of a research group as being comparable with the concept of extended family, and hui (a ritualistic form of gathering) as a framework within which research relationships are enacted and constituted. The metaphorical connections that are drawn between Western and Maori research

processes create an opening for cross cultural constructions of perception that are grounded in Maori culture, but which open up Western perceptions to the influence and power of Maori culture.

Within Pacific research there are metaphors that have been constructed to build bridges between Western educational processes and Pacific educational processes that place the hopes and aspirations of Pacific cultures at the forefront of planning for an education system that is appropriate for them. The Tree of Opportunity metaphor has been an influential one, and is cited often within Pacific educational research (see Burnett, 2009; George & Rodriguez, 2009; Huffer & Qalo; Koya-Vaka'uta, 2002; Sanga & Niroa, 2004; Teasdale, Tokai, & Puamau, 2005). The value of this metaphor is recognised by many, for its longitudinal vision and its potential for encouraging solidarity and unity in action towards common interests. But the Tree of Opportunity is also a good example of the way in which the Western context and privileging of sight, in which it has been used and employed has dominated and restricted its utilization.

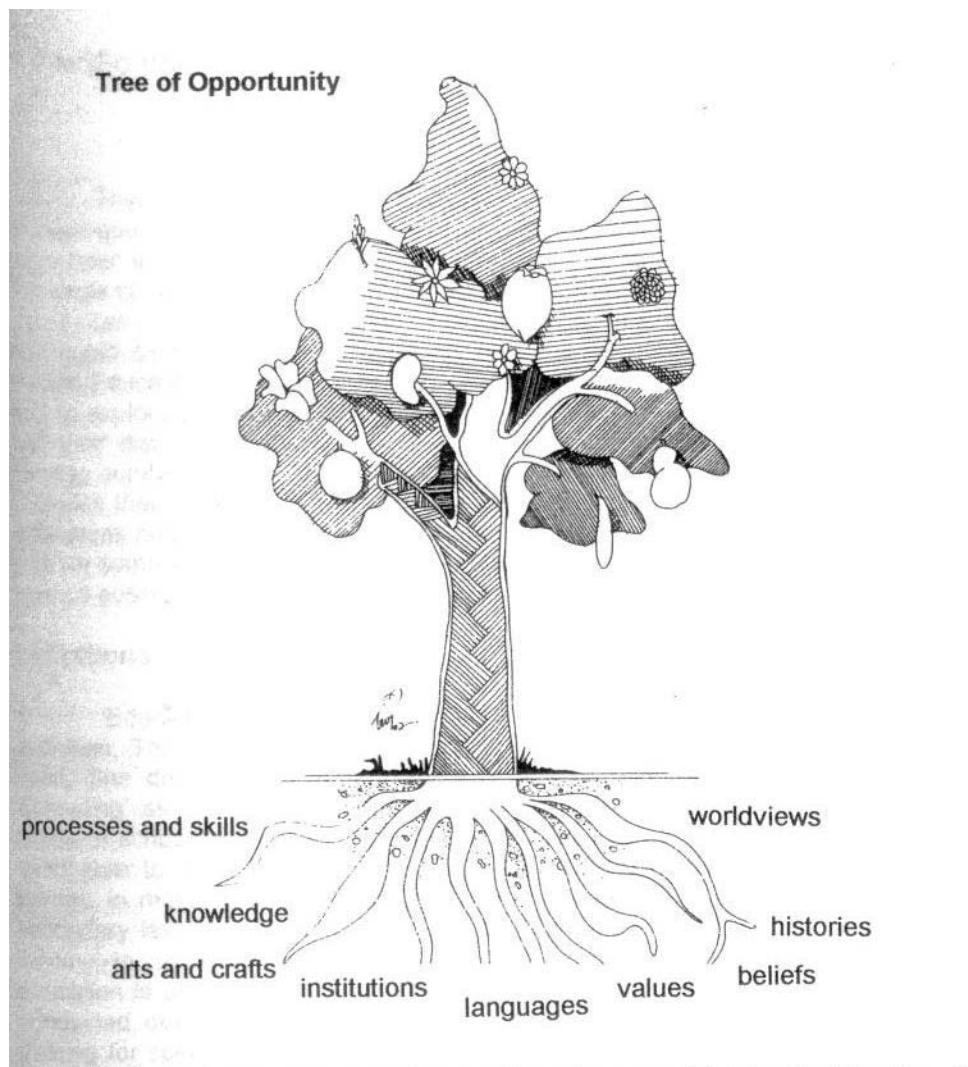


Figure 4 The Tree of Opportunity

(Benson, 2002, p. 3)

The Tree of Opportunity came out of the ‘Re-Thinking Pacific Education’ colloquium held at the University of the South Pacific in 2001, to encapsulate the new vision for Pacific education. This vision is the “survival, transformation and sustainability of Pacific Peoples and societies, with its outcomes measured in terms of performance and

appropriate behaviour in the multiple contexts in which they have to live"(Benson, 2002, p. 3). Benson (2002, p. 3) described the Tree of Opportunity as follows:

Education, or the Tree of Opportunity is firmly rooted in the cultures of Pacific societies. The strengths and advantages it gains from its root source will allow it to grow strong and healthy, and further permit the incorporation of foreign or external elements that can be grafted on without changing its fundamental root sources or the identity of each tree ... and be useful for a variety of purposes without destroying its roots or the new grafted elements

The Tree of Opportunity metaphor articulates Pacific identity through the vision's politically advantageous emphasis on sight which, despite seeking freedom from Western constructs, manifests similar characteristics instead, at least in its mode of apprehending the world. It draws boundaries of a Pacific cultural identity against an-'other' through the use of words such as "foreign", "external", and "grafted", fixing a one dimensional view of Pacific culture which emphasises appearance over substance. The Tree of Opportunity also pictorially breaks up (and separates) the parts of the vision (arts and crafts, institutions, languages, values, beliefs, histories, worldviews, processes and skills).

Although at first glance these parts direct the viewer's attention towards wide and diverse aspects of culture, making these easier to embed in areas of educational policy, it also creates a perspective of Pacific cultures which emphasises Western processes of knowing over alternative ones, such as analysis over synthesis, and detachment over involvement, despite its ambitions in articulating an integrated and holistic Pacific vision of education. As Oliver Sacks (2005, p. 41) suggests, the power of such simple and largely imagistic ways of constructing Pacific identity, although invaluable in the sense of

accommodating sometimes overwhelming institutional power dynamics, all the same has “something passive and mechanical and impersonal about [it], which makes [it] utterly different from the higher and more personal powers of the imagination, where there is a continual struggle for concepts and form and meaning”.

The simplicity implied in a Pan-Pacific identity has sparked a growing debate, between maintaining and furthering the notion of a Pan-Pacific identity, or an ethnic specific identity, is becoming more widespread for reasons that relate to the growing population of Pacific Peoples who are born in New Zealand, Australia and other countries overseas.

There are many different views on the advantages of both. Melanie Anae (1997) has articulated the negative implications of a Pan-Pacific identity, relating it to the continued dominance of mainly Western perceptions of Pacific Peoples. She sees this as part of the ongoing push to understand Pacific Peoples by classifying and labeling them, “distorting[ing] the reality of peoples caught within these identities”, echoing Said’s (2007) observation of the twisted realities of Other cultures that are brought into being through Orientalism. “Pan-ethnic identities”, stated Anae, “such as the “Pacific Islander” category, has become an active component of the dominant group’s worldview. It has organized *their* action, and consequently *our* experience. Cornell (as cited in Anae, 1997, p. 130) states that “the result is a revelation: we discover that, in their eyes, we are something we have never been in our own”.

The disadvantages of a Pan-Pacific identity have been moderated by others such as Pauline Luafutu Simpson (2006) who does not quite see the choice between the two as being so necessarily polar, and maintains the usefulness of understanding and negotiating the terrain of both collective and ethnic-specific Pacific identities. Quoting Helen Morton Lee, Luafutu-Simpson pointed out that ethnic specific identities are not always available to those who claim to be of a specific Pacific identity, because each culture holds its own standards and pressures in regards to its own constructions of an authentic Samoan or Tongan or Fijian cultural identity. She stated: "Anae also ignores the possibility that for some young "Islanders" living overseas, it may not be possible for them to establish secure identities within their specific "ethnic' groups, even as adults, if they lack the language and cultural competence that enables them to be acknowledged by others as authentic members of that group (Morton 2003:250)" (Luafutu-Simpson, 2006, p. 94).

Challenges of authenticity and legitimacy to Pacific People's specific ethnic identities are examined in an article by Emily Keddell (2006). Keddell points to the lack of acceptance, willingness and capacity to claim one or the other identities in an immigrant context, and the difficulties involved when juggling pressures from multiple cultures in multiple contexts. The dominance of other people's perceptions, whether Western or (in this case) Samoan, severely constrain the choices of those whose experiences of multiple identities means that their standards of legitimacy and authenticity are different, but are no less valid, and actually enrich and add to their capacities to contribute to different

Pacific communities in a unique way. Keddell (2006) stated, "The idea of 'choice' has numerous problems when a particular identity may be forced upon them by a wider society that subscribes to ideologies of 'race' based on ancestry and colour, or traditional ideals unattainable for young people in an immigrant context."

From my own experiences of hybridity I can say that I do agree to an extent with the points raised about Pan-Pacific identity by Luafutu-Simpson (2006). Hybridity is a significant challenge in understanding my role as a researcher with Pacific communities, and to be accepted in the way that I identify as being of Pacific cultural identity, especially since I fall short of meeting the language "criteria", and I look different.

On the whole however, I agree more with Anae (1997) than with Luafutu-Simpson (2006). At this point it is pertinent to return to the central preoccupation in this chapter, which is the difficulties presented by dominant Western modes of perception, namely sight, to Pacific People's identity constructions, and what the implications of that are for Pacific People's education. The popularity of largely one dimensional, simplistic visual representations of Pacific People's culture has restricted the opportunity for the many multiple and varied dimensions of culture - its flesh and blood – to be available for considering their educational implications in diverse and meaningful ways. Recognizing the distinctiveness and differences inherent within cultural perspectives can provide another way of understanding how to address educational challenges that maintain the

cultural integrity of Pacific Peoples in a Western context, and their sense of uniqueness and difference that *is* the nature of identity.

## **PART THREE: MULTISENSORY PERCEPTIONS OF PACIFIC IDENTITY**

One of the most significant ways to raise awareness of important cultural differentiations is through exploring cultural conceptualizations of the world. There have been some advances here in educational research that communicates how different Pacific cultures 'see' research processes and educational practices in ways that are comparable with Western research processes. The Tivaevae metaphor, the Kakala metaphor and the Tree of Opportunity metaphor are three notable examples.

The Tivaevae metaphor, created by Ma-Ua Hodges, is described by Mara (2007) in her work on ethnic identity construction with Pacific women. The metaphor is used to illustrate Western notions of co-operative learning and teaching "as being analogous to the making of traditional Cook Islands bedspreads ... There are steps to follow as the women work together to design the patterns, cut the materials into agreed shapes and sizes and lay them out" (2007, p. 93)

Thaman's (1993) Tongan Kakala curriculum metaphor is also commonly cited (see Anae, et al., 2001; Koloto, Katoanga, & Tatila, 2006; D. L. Mara, 2007; Ordonez, 2000) as a way of illustrating a Pacific equivalent of a Western education process. A Tongan understanding of the significance, purpose and process of curriculum production is

grounded in physical, cultural and spiritual understandings in Tongan culture. Each stage of the production of kakala, toli, tui, and luva, makes tangible the ‘inter’ in social relationships and power structures in Tongan society with the flowers being ranked just as people are ranked, in relation to each other.

Although both of these metaphors are widely cited (Koloto, et al., 2006; McFall-McCaffery, 2010) their potential to open up alternative ways of understanding identity construction is largely under-appreciated. These metaphors illuminate how cross-cultural pedagogy and educational philosophy can be drawn on to further understanding about equivalent processes in cross-cultural contexts. But a greater potential of these metaphors lies in exploring how they are constructed, and at what points and in what (multidimensional) ways, does each object of comparison define and give meaning to the other? That is, how does Pacific culture actually intersect with and reverberate through different areas and levels of action in an education system? (Williamson, 1992) How are the movements and the physical organization of the Tivaevae, the movements of women as they work, the texture and feel and visual appreciation of the Tivaevae, significant? And how can those perceptual aspects resonate with elements of a cultural framework that support a Western based notion of cooperation?

Considering these sorts of questions is what Classen (1993, p. 136) refers to as ‘the multi-sensory dimensions’, the ‘beyond’ of cultures, where the interplay of all ways of perceiving (not just visual) as they are lived and engaged by each of us in our own ways

throughout our lives, must be considered. Until this happens, the interpretations of educational metaphors that currently inform research are “*ipso facto condemned to dealing with surfaces which have a ‘beyond’ they can never attain to*”(Ong as cited in Classen, 1993, p. 16).

Instead of continuing to work within the dominant paradigms of rationality (of the mind) and (mainly visual) metaphorical pathways into meaning making, it may be more useful to challenge these, to open up new avenues for considering how to improve Pacific People’s educational achievement. By posing alternative modes of perception of understanding, new opportunities can be created to become more fully aware of how Western and Pacific cultural concepts intersect within a New Zealand educational context. This could be useful in enabling more effective educational engagement with those who claim hybrid Pacific identity in New Zealand, as well as with members of Pacific nations that have been left with a legacy of a colonial education system that does not resonate with their own cultural ways of being.

As I showed in the Introduction, to generate alternative perspectives on Pacific identity construction and its relationship to education, I have turned to my own experiences and to the particularities of key events and times in my life that have directed my attention to the significance of hybrid identity construction and educational achievement.

Those explorations led me to consider autoethnography as a useful research methodology within which to explore these issues. I explain autoethnography, and how I used it in my study, in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND PACIFIC RESEARCH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Autoethnography is an ethnographic research method that gives me the freedom to construct my representations and analysis of cultural identity in ways that approximate how I have experienced it. It is a method that privileges the researcher, placing my processes of meaning making and knowledge generation at the centre, in order to understand the particularities of social and cultural processes.

This chapter is written in two parts, the first of which positions the methodology of autoethnography within the wider field of social science research. It examines the assumptions and purposes of autoethnography, and some of the reasons as to why it is appropriate for research with Pacific Peoples.

The second part of this chapter describes my research method, explaining how I drew on the concept of a bricoleur to guide my thinking about what different sources of guidance and inspiration from my personal and professional life could give me the tools to reflect on and understand my experiences.

## **The Situation with Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is a branch of Ethnography, which is the most appropriate broad, research discipline for my topic for reasons that relate to its focus on context and culture and a requirement for a personal connection to the topic of interest. This connection often occurs through a momentous (sometimes painful) event, or as a slow incremental attraction which is born of a natural curiosity for exploring the ‘why’, the mystery, of what happens in everyday life. As Ellis (2004, p. 26) agrees with Buddy Goodall, “you don’t really choose ethnography; it chooses you.”

Ethnography is a qualitative social science research method where qualitative research in sociology and anthropology was traditionally “born out of concern to understand the ‘other’.”

Furthermore, this other was the exotic other, a primitive nonwhite person from a foreign culture judged to be less civilized than that of the researcher...there would be no colonial, and now no postcolonial, history were it not for this investigative mentality that turned the dark-skinned other into the object of the ethnographers gaze. (2003b, p. 2)

The investigation of “the exotic other” purposefully situates the researcher in relation to the research as being quite far away from the object of study, and part of the overall process of Other-ing referred to in Chapter One. Researcher positioning has been a central theme within the historical debates about what methodologies constitute useful, valid and reliable research. These debates have occurred between quantitative and

qualitative research methodologies and questions have focused around which is the more reliable standpoint for the production of knowledge.

Bryman (1984) has outlined the positions of each of these two main threads of social science research, within which Ethnography and the appropriateness of autoethnography for research with Pacific Peoples, can be viewed. "Quantitative methodology", he explained, "is routinely depicted as an approach to the conduct of social research which applies a natural science, and in particular a positivist, approach to social phenomena" (Bryman, 1984, p. 77).

I interpret a natural science, experimentalist approach, which gained momentum during the Enlightenment, to emphasise rational, sight-based knowledge ("facts") over that which was based on spiritual faith ("invisible" knowledge or subjective opinion). The privileging of sight, as the main point of sensory access to knowledge, served to reinforce the distance between the researcher and research participants, as the lowest form of knowledge in the Western hierarchy of sense (at the time that sight began its ascendency) was touch, which precluded any possibility of maintaining any distance in the relationship between researcher and participants.

Qualitative methodologies on the other hand retain a commitment to seeing the social world from the point of view of the actor<sup>20</sup> (Bryman, 1984, p. 77). Therefore, unlike quantitative research, closeness in the relationship between researcher and participant is advocated, though how much closeness depends on the overall purpose for undertaking the research.

Further, unlike positivist approaches to research, which privilege one form of truth (derived from “objective”, experimental methods to ascertain “facts”), interpretive and critical approaches to qualitative research hold a commitment to being interdisciplinary and multimethod, where “no specific method or practice can be privileged over any other” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a, p. 10), and so is focused on employing many different perspectives from which to interpret human experience.

In regard to these debates, Narayan (1993, p. 671) has proposed that it is less helpful to argue about where the researcher is positioned in relation to the research participants, than to consider the motivations and agendas, the ethical concerns, behind why it is that we are conducting the research in the first place. Narayan’s view is supported by Bochner (2000, p. 267), who previously stated that these kinds of debates around determining what is reliable and worthwhile knowledge based on how objective or

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Actor’ is a sociological term. It has a variety of meanings, relating to the position of an individual member of society and their status and role within that society. An actor can refer to a person who occupies a position of power whereby they have knowledge or privilege enough to act to change aspects of their situation in life, negotiating through social expectations, obligations and responsibilities. An actor can also refer to a person as an object, whereby they are constrained in some way, being acted upon by social forces (see Johnson, 1960, p. 14)

subjective someone is, largely miss the point of research. Research should not create resentment and alienation amongst people, by shutting off doors to ways of knowing and understanding a world that is “messy, complicated, uncertain”, but rather open up realms of possibilities. It should retain the power of the imagination in the understanding that we bring to the world around us, asking the question, ‘what if this were true’ rather than ‘how can this be true’, constantly searching for alternatives (Bochner, 2000, p. 267).

Thaman’s poem, ‘Our Way’, explores the possibility of alternatives, from the perspective of Pacific Peoples and their alternative ways of creating knowledge and meaning that are rooted in their cultures.

## **A Poetic Consideration of Autoethnography within Pacific Research**

**Our Way** - Konai Helu Thaman (2003, pp. 3-4)

your way  
objective  
analytic  
always doubting  
the truth  
until proof comes  
slowly  
quietly  
and it hurts

my way  
subjective  
gut-feeling like  
always sure  
of the truth  
the proof  
is there  
waiting  
and it hurts

Thaman's poem sums up the differences between positivist research approaches and qualitative research approaches, the perspectives that underpin them ("Your Way," "Our way") and the impact of them both on Pacific Peoples. The opening verse situates positivist research, "objective" and "analytic" within its impact on Pacific Peoples, who through positivist research methods have been objectified for study and "hurt". Underneath the word "hurt" is a wealth of anger about the impacts that positivist research, and many of its methods dispersed throughout the wider consciousness of society, has had on Pacific Peoples (see Loto, et al., 2006). Linda Tuhiwai Smith has described in great depth the impact on Maori and other colonized peoples as follows:

...The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples." (Smith, 2006, p. 1)

The emotion that is simmering in Smith's assertions is also present in the views of Pacific researchers, who express their consternation at research methodologies that impose Western perspectives on Pacific ways of being. Although referring to the area of Pacific studies in formal education, Thaman (2003) has asserted the need for decolonizing ways of knowing that are involved in all forms of educational processes with Pacific Peoples, and a re-claiming of that space. Thaman (2003, p. 3) stated that: "(1) it is about acknowledging and recognizing the dominance of Western philosophy, content, and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific Peoples; (2) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples"

Autoethnography is one such methodology in which understanding the world in alternative ways is valued. It allows me to incorporate different methods of representation and exploration that best reflect my experiences of hybrid cultural identity construction.

## **Defining Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is a research approach which employs subjective and sometimes objective perspectives in drawing primarily upon the self for sociological understanding, with a focus on helping us know how to live and to cope with life, and to improve the quality of our lives (Kiesinger, 2002; Sparkes, 2002; Wall, 2006). Personal experience is used to pursue an integrated perspective of a social or cultural phenomenon through

ways that best approximate and represent that personal experience. It is a highly personal and emergent method, positioning the researcher as the “epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (Spry, 2001, p. 711). The researcher’s own reflexivity and voice is used to understand social and cultural phenomena with a concern for moral, ethical and political consequences (Ellis, 1999).

One of the most significant aspects of autoethnography is its emphasis on making room for the diversities and uniqueness of individual experience, rather than aiming to generalize and presenting individual experience as just another part of a “huddled mass of humanity” (Doty, 2010, p. 1048). Autoethnographic methods therefore deliberately blur distinctions between the literary, the artistic or aesthetic, and the sociological, using an enormous variety of representations through often arts-based methods such as short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, fragmented and layered writing, social science prose and artistic installations.

Whatever the method of research, the mode of its representation, autoethnographic methods are created and employed on the basis of their power to awaken or evoke in the spectator new understandings, to create different meanings, to heal, teach, incite, inspire, or provoke (Bochner & Ellis, 2003). Autoethnography seeks to maintain difference and distinctiveness, where these fundamental aspects of human life are understood within research, not as “issues to be settled, but differences to be lived with” (Rorty as cited in Bochner, 2000, p. 266) because, “Until we recognize these differences as a reflection of

incommensurable ways of seeing, we cannot begin to engage in meaningful conversation with each other."

Tom Barone (2008, p. 35) uses the term "epistemologically humble arts-based research" to describe an arts-based research approach (which autoethnography often uses) that does not purport to hold any answers, or seek to convince the other side of the rightness of one's position. Rather it aims to engender an aesthetic experience in its readers or viewers in order to establish empathy, connections, alter perceptions, touch emotions, and question the status-quo.

Some autoethnographers however are uncomfortable with maintaining such high levels of involvement of the whole self in the research and such strong degrees of connection with research participants (in addition to the self) and consequently have attempted to reinsert the distance in the relationship between themselves and their research subjects. Analytic Autoethnography, put forward by Leon Anderson (2006), is an example of this where there is a strong emphasis on remaining objective in the representation of his research in order to maintain a degree of connection with more traditional forms of ethnography. In explaining what is different about Anderson's Analytic Autoethnography, from that purported by researchers such as Denzin & Richardson (2002) and Laurel Richardson (2002), Ellis (2006, p. 431) responded with an observation that Anderson's Analytic Autoethnography caused her to become "a detached spectator. I become only a head, cut off from my body and emotions ... There's

no personal story to engage me. Knowledge and theory become disembodied words on the page and I lose connection. I want to linger in the world of experience, you know, feel it, taste it, sense it, live in it ..."

The point that Ellis makes about the human factor of research is the importance of care and empathy - that which is missing in Anderson's work - the greater commitment of autoethnography to moving the world to change, by "writ[ing] from the heart" (Pelias, 2004, p. 2). Autoethnography more often aspires to a heartfelt connection with its viewers, "to put on display a researcher who, instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings [her]self forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study" (Pelias, 2004, p. 1). Notions of empathy, understanding, love and an ethic of care that is constituted within the cultural processes of Pacific Peoples is what is needed to truly understand what worthwhile and reliable research might amount to with Pacific People.

## **Is Autoethnography Ethical with Pacific Peoples?**

Over the last ten years or so Pacific researchers have issued calls for research that promotes a philosophy of reciprocity and care, not just methodologies that aim, at best, to avoid "expos[ing] participants to unnecessary harm" (Massey University, 2010) but methodologies that actively seek to do good, to promote cooperation, discussion, collaboration, and reciprocity in research relationships (Anae, et al., 2001; Halapua, 2000; Robinson & Robinson, 2005; Vaioleti, 2006)

An ethic of caring has been strongly advocated in the work of the feminist educator Nel Noddings (1988, 1992, 2003). Noddings has been committed to the ethic of caring for people in education, where the act and understanding of caring does not stem primarily from adherence to recognised moral principles, or rules, but where caring comes from within. As she puts it, it comes from people who

respond directly as carers (out of sympathy) or as faithful members of a community that espouses helping and not harming. In considering education, then, we have to ask how best to cultivate the moral sentiments and how to develop communities that will support, not destroy, caring relations. (Noddings, 2003, p. xvi)

In proposing this ethic of care, Noddings (1992) has asserted that it goes against the liberalist tradition of many Western school systems, where competitiveness is fostered rather than caring for people, and rationality and abstract reasoning are the most highly privileged forms of knowledge. Within the field of education, Anae (1998) and others (see Anae, et al., 2001; Ma-Ua Hodges, 2000; Mitaera, 1997; Nakhid et al., 2007) have also called passionately for there to be more discussion about research approaches other than those that just focus primarily on methodological debates about the rigorousness and theoretical rightness of any one particular method. Rather than focusing on abstract methodological problems, as Narayan and Bochner have both argued, the questions of methodology should be focused around whether or not it supports research which develops relationships built on mutual respect and trust, and privileging care as indispensable from the creation of knowledge. As Anae stated, “with any human relationship, reciprocity, responsiveness, commitment and responsibility are essential.

In turn this relationship will form the basis of our intellectual pursuit" (Anae, 1998, p. 23).

As I thought about my research topic and how I might approach my study of hybrid cultural identity construction, I tried to hold to these principles of ethic and care in relationships.

## **MY METHOD OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

Exploring a hybrid cultural identity - how it is formed, what it is and what it means - requires exploring a reality that is all the time shifting, intending itself to be imaginatively understood. "At the beginning of my research", writes Suominen (2004, p. 52), "I did not know what kind of research project would emerge from my intuitive and creative investigation ... the theory has been read into my behavior and practices afterwards."

My research explorations began when I went around on holiday with my family over the summer of 2009 in Fiji. I spent my time reading articles, poetry and history books at the Suva Public Library. I sat on my own for long periods, staring out to sea and reflecting on what I had learnt. I bought a digital recorder and recorded personal conversations that involved me, as well as ones that didn't, popular songs and hymns, parts of the Catholic Mass when we attended it at church, as well as Mass as it was said at home. I took photographs of things that might not have been that outstanding at the time, but which

triggered some interest I felt was intuitively connected to what I was studying. In effect, I was producing “a bricolage – that is, a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a, p. 5). These formed the tools (“photographs” and “stories”) that I used to create my research design [construct] an allegorical and layered text that continually turns inward, travels and forms connections between different layers, stages, and through the process, interprets itself (Clifford as cited in Suominen, 2004, p. 52).

## A Bricoleur

Denzin and Lincoln used this term, to denote a researcher who is “A Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person” (Levi-Strauss as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a, p. 5). This term also includes, as Kincheloe (2005, p. 324) noted, in the spirit of Levi-Strauss, the concept of *tinkering* with the research method in field-based and interpretive contexts where, for example, the methodological demands turn upon “mercurial, unpredictable and ... complex” interactions of the researcher with what it is that they are studying. Kincheloe (2001, p. 682) emphasised that “critical bricoleurs employ historiographical, philosophical, and social theoretical lenses to gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design”.

In my study, as described also by Suominen, some of these theoretical lenses were found and used later to further my understandings of the material I created. In the initial stages of my research, I used American Haiku poetry or POPs and mind-maps which included

photographs in places as well. I intuitively became engaged in actively constructing “research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the “correct,” universally applicable methodologies...[to avoid] modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 325).

The Buddhist context, that maintained understandings has a reliance on direct experience, which inspired the American Haiku form has helped me to ground my experiences of cultural identity within an embodied context. POPs are the term that beatnik poet and novelist Jack Kerouac uses to describe “short 3-line poems or “pomes” rhyming or non-rhyming delineating “little Samadhis” if possible, usually of a Buddhist connotation, aimed towards enlightenment’ ... and FLASH, ‘Dreamflashes, short sleepdreams or drowse daydreams of an enlightened nature describable in a few words” (Kerouac as cited in Haynes, 2005, p. 156). I decided that one way to build understanding of the processes of hybrid identity construction was to use perspectives and representations which, like Kerouac’s POPs, look “like jazz, which is improvisation, [that] create the sense that images, sounds, and understandings are blending together, overlapping, and forming a composite, a new creation”(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, pp. 4-5). Thus I used I the back of anything that I didn’t need to write POPs to jot down my insights, from airline tickets and boarding passes, to postcards, receipts, the back of sheet music, drink coasters and just my note pad.

These little verse-patches formed the primary colours with which I mixed together “a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6). Each representation could only be defined and described in relation to the other as they bump up against each other in a constant movement of contrasting and complementary images.

What I wrote for the POPs contained my thoughts about what I was experiencing at a particular moment, but what was equally useful for helping me develop understandings was the material on which I wrote it, the sensory qualities of which placed me back into the moment of experience. The more it harboured the details of the moment, a coffee stain, a wrinkle, a smell, the more it became a concrete way of retouching the experience and its context, literally and imaginatively, collapsing the disparities of dreamtime or imaginative understanding and material experience, into something that was one and the same, in the form of a holistic perspective.

These sorts of connections are similar to Kerouac’s “Dreamflashes” mentioned earlier, the “short sleepdreams or drowse daydreams of an enlightened nature” where enlightenment, in a commonsense meaning a kind of intense and holistic understanding, arises from the merging of dreamlike (memory infused) images with physical landmarks and the lived constructions by which we know our way around.

Stoller (1994, p. 636) stated that the “body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories.” A point which is shared with Classen (1993, p. 136) who linked the sensory experiences

of life with the expressions or embodiment of cultural values: "the way in which a society senses is the way that it understands ... sensory values are cultural values [which] not only frame a culture's experience, they express its ideals, its hopes and its fears." The tang of fresh-cut pineapples cutting through the diesel fumes at the central bus station in Suva reignited for me the time spent with my Godmother on the Island of Gau, and culinary reconstructions of home in her kitchen. The blaring racket of the pumping stereos that repelled one from Indian electronic and clothing stores long before they came into sight hit me with images of Indo-Fijian blends of curry powder in brown paper packets, opened in our kitchen in Palmerston North, over a hot goat curry. These physical realities are experienced as sensations which are not just experiential and without critical thought, but sensations which imagination makes meaning out of. Sklar, quoting Johnson, stated:

Via imagination, we abstract from and structure sensations ... into figurative somatic understandings (up/down, fast/slow, round/triangular/square, bound/free, etc.). These "embodied schemata" (also called "image schemata") are cognitive structures that mediate between bodies-that-provide-us-with-sensations and intellects-that-conceptualize-these-as representations. (Sklar, 2001, p. 92)

When I came back from Fiji, I reflected on the Haikus that I had written in light of the articles that I was searching out for broad understanding of the field of identity in which I wanted to work, and how I wanted to represent it. I drew on multidisciplinary experiential knowledge from areas that Kincheloe (2005, p. 323) outlines as examples of multidisciplinary pathways of knowing and understanding the world that form the methodological bricolage. For example, I have used my English and Performing Arts teaching background to decide how to best represent my experiences with different

sorts of texts such as poetry, fragmented writing, vignettes and personal communications.

To guide myself in my thinking, when it came to structuring my thesis and representing my autoethnographic material, I constructed two concept maps, a written concept map (Figure 5) and a photographic concept map (Figure 6). Small versions of these maps are included below, but for the full sized versions please see Appendix 1. These maps were completed in two stages, where the photographic concept map followed the first written concept map. After completing the written concept map I imaginatively applied it to my memories, using photographs to spark emotive and instinctive responses so that I could better figure out the most significant ways in which I had sensed particular cultural aspects.

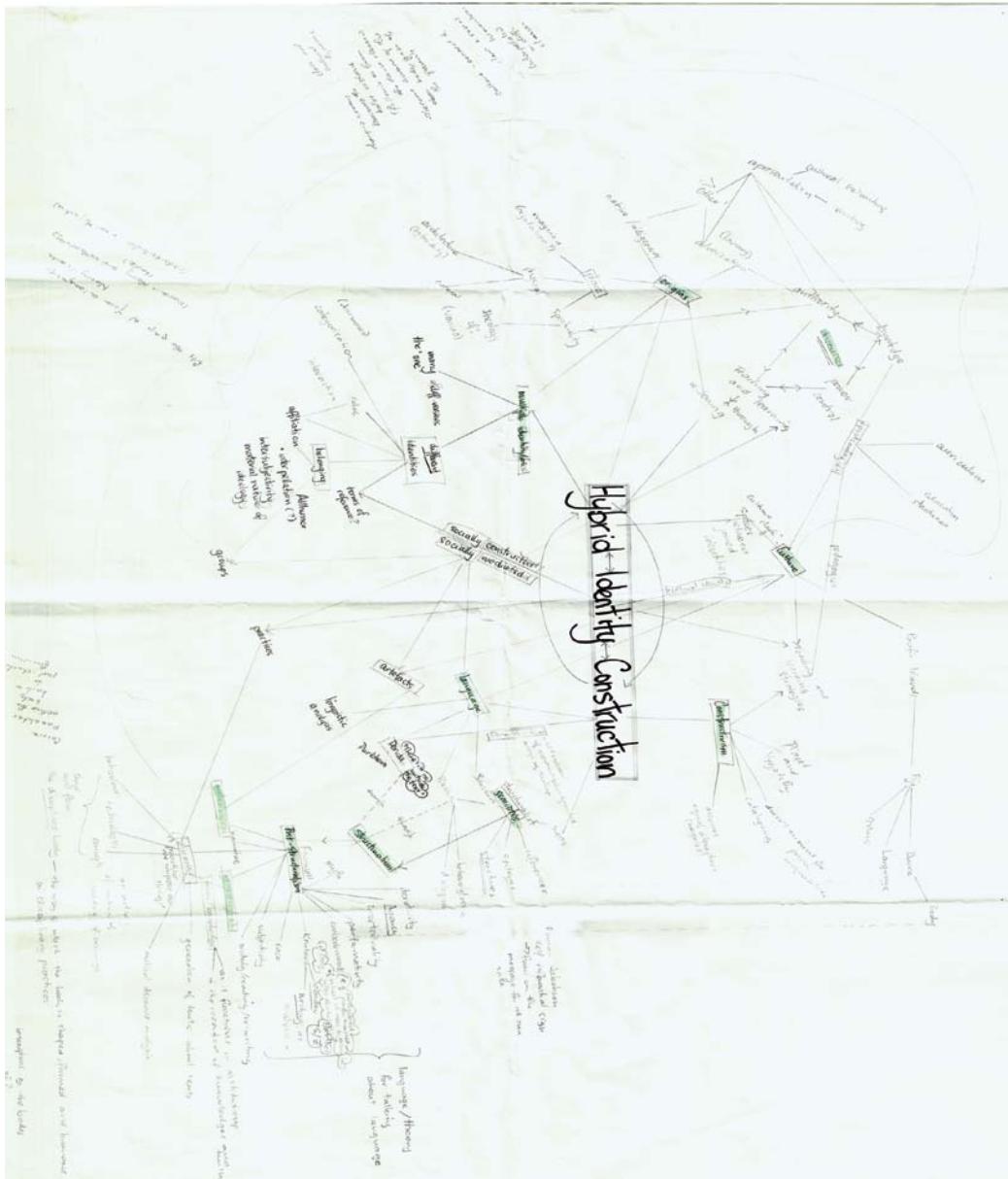
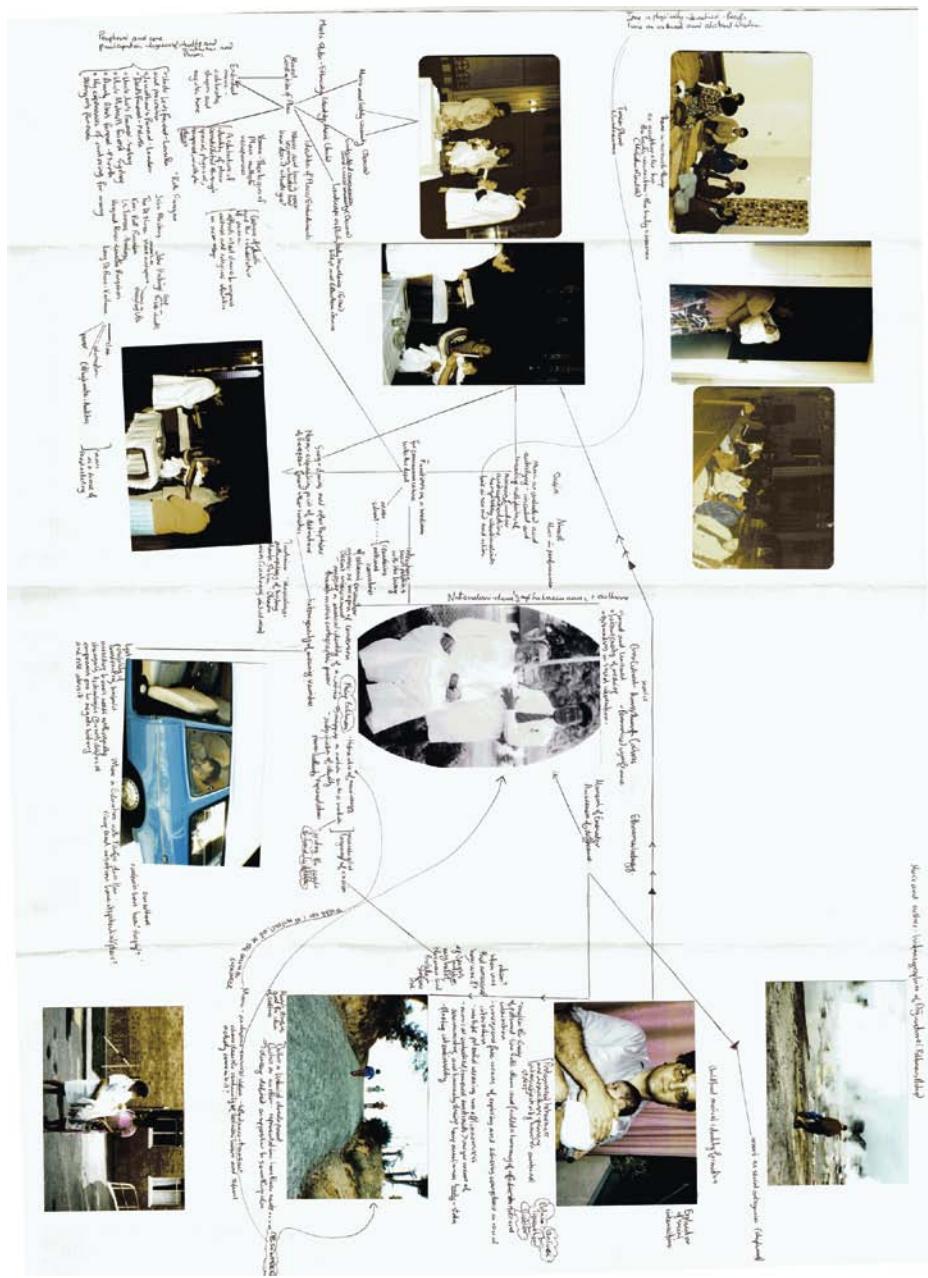


Figure 5 Stage One Concept Map



## **Approaching an Ethic of Care**

The production of autoethnographic texts for this thesis has presented ethical challenges that have been difficult to predict, because of the ‘unsettled’ nature of the approach. Given that this research is intended to inform educational research with Pacific Peoples, it has relied heavily on what I, and my mother understand, in terms of what a Fijian research ethos would mean from our own personal, cultural experiences. Much of this understanding has been crafted in very deliberate ways by both my parents, who have supported and enabled the education of so many of my cousins, aunts and uncles over both of their lifetimes. My parents would not just let actions speak for themselves, but would make a regular point of explaining to my brother and I the purpose behind supporting the extended family for example, and what this meant in the context of Fiji, as well as in our context here in New Zealand and Australia.

When approaching my mother (or my father, as I did through prayer and memory) I would make sure, as my parents had, of the purpose of the discussion I wanted to have. I would always explain to my mother why the need had arisen for me to ask more questions of her, of other family members, and of the connection between Mum and Dad. I would record her oral consent, and ask Mum to explain why she was willing to participate in the research. Understanding the research from Mum’s perspective was particularly important because of the closeness of our relationship and in hindsight, it can be said that the discussion of the research has improved our relationship and

communication styles, but this was never the primary motivator in our discussions and interviews.

With Dad this was not possible in the same way, but it was possible in my imaginative and remembered conversations with him that aimed to maintain the trust we had in our relationship when he was alive. There was little that I could imagine that I would say about Dad that would place him in a light that would compromise his place and role within the family or wider relationships.

The meanings of respect, care, trust, and reciprocity, have been generated within the relationship management between my parents and my family in Fiji and Australia as regards the family's education. Through letters, emails, phone calls, and family conferences, in New Zealand, Fiji and Australia I would be made aware of the communications amongst the family, as what was said or written was always shared with my brother and I. The resulting openness required to build trust, and allow people to take educational risks, such as studying to a higher level than they would without the family's moral support, or undertaking business ventures on the financial aid of my parents, has informed the way I have aimed for transparency of process with those involved in my research.

I have asked for permission from those I have named, given them material I have written to read and check for accuracy and their comfort with what I have written, as early as

possible, and so have allowed ample time for them to withdraw that permission as well.

In addition, I have maintained personal contact, where possible, with those in my research that I may not be so personally close to (such as my supervisors for this thesis), to do what I can to let them get to know what kind of a person I am in other areas of my life outside of the research, including areas of personal challenge and difficulty in my life.

It has been tricky revealing some experiences that could be interpreted as boastful or not particularly humble, especially when emphasizing the strength of character it took for my family to establish their lives in the way they have, being rejected from the Vola Ni Kawa Bula. Predicting negative responses to the perspective I have provided, especially about our rejection, and leaving out or minimizing information that could potentially harm my family, has been guided through reflections on incidents in my life, where there have been misunderstandings and miscommunication around a family issue. The most important thing always been to maintain the trust and goodwill within the relationship, in order to maintain the integrity of the information provided and the understanding acquired.

Autoethnography – its process and product - is a “glimpse of everything”, of unforeclosable thoughts and memories and possibilities of reflection, that happens when you remember, presented in the way that everything comes, “in piecemeal bombardments, continuously, rat tat tatting ...” (Kerouac as cited in Haynes, 2005, p. 156). Stoller (2004, p. 822) describes this bombardment of the past and the present, and

the reflections on and expressions of both, as the unstable matrix that "lies at the heart of an individual's embodied memories and perceptions and is a cornerstone of a sensuous ethnography." This has formed for me an identity, encircled by and embodied within the circumstances of my family's journey and their embodied practices that have persisted and maintained a strong sense of cultural continuity across different locations and circumstances. Through senses of touch and smell around hair, land and oceanscape, skin and body shape in dance, and through the sound of music, I have formed my understanding of places and spaces and where I belong. I turn now to telling these stories and reflecting on them.

The following interlude was written by my father for my mother, expressing his thoughts and reflections on the death of her father.

## INTERLUDE

*Marie, For your Father*

*He was born to feel the cut of the line  
Across his work shaped hand,  
When the sea would swell & the fish would rush  
And the boat sped from the land.*

*He would pray to his God for the thrum of keel  
And a fair wave tossed & sighing,  
For the beat of the sun on the drum skim sea  
And the wing of a sea bird crying.*

*When the lanterns at night marked the boats at work  
Well fixed by the edge of reefs.  
He would whisper to thee of a sailors dreams  
Of the waves great heights, and the seas great deeps.*

*He gave to the loved of his own hands born  
A joy in the far wide lee  
And he sang thee the tales & the legends fair  
Of his mistress & lover the sea.*

*In the time of his loss & his loved one's grief  
As his soul sped into the night,  
When the seas great grace washed across his face  
The sound that engulfed him then  
Were the words of his own and loving God –  
Come and enter my Kingdom my friend,  
Rest and sleep my fisherman friend,  
I am the fisher of men*

*Robin  
July 1977, N.Z.*

## **CHAPTER THREE: A BRICOLAGE OF SCENT, HAIR, MUSIC AND DANCE**

“O memory child what entered at the  
Eye, ecstasy, air or water?  
What at the mouth?”

Allen Curnow  
(‘At Dead Low Water’)

My cultural identity has been formed through sensuous, embodied processes that have centered on hair, dance and music. My body is the nexus through which culture is constructed, produced, sustained and understood, being “involved in every kind of social practice” (Connell, 1987, p. 77). Embodiment is a way of understanding human existence that encompasses a person's “biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural, historical and geographical location” (2006, p. 89).

Embodiment can be compared to a holistic comprehension of the world which originates from within the body as a cognitive site of meaning and meaning-making, a notion which can be expressed in Fijian, as “Na vaka savasavataki kei na vaka rokorokotaki na yago kei na yalo”. These words can be used by the Nai Vuke Vuke, who in Fijian culture, speaks on behalf of the priest with regards to matters of religion or leadership. The words explain and reinforce the coming together of the body and the spirit in living respectfully (rokorokotaki), by maintaining a purity (savasavataki) or involving oneself in a purification and cleanliness of both body and soul in order to give and show dignity to

both, in the living out of Fijian culture. Douglass St Christian (1994, p. iii), in his doctoral thesis examining embodiment in Samoan culture, expresses a similar principle: "By linking everyday embodying practices with Samoan concerns for dignity, humility, and strength, I argue for a different way of looking at bodies, one which locates the body as a process of awareness and enactment, and not simply a thing culture acts upon."

This chapter begins with the journeys of my grandparents, and then includes the bricolage of short vignettes about my embodied experiences and their cultural interpretations. Each of the vignettes and interpretations concentrate on different senses and the way they have constituted a sense of space and place in my life.

## PART ONE: MY GRANDPARENTS – A SENSUOUS JOURNEY

My grandfather was born in Betio – an island to the extreme South West of Tarawa to an I-Kiribati mother and a Chinese father, who had migrated as a fisherman, from Southern China, and was a Qalomai<sup>21</sup>. My grandfather had a well-travelled childhood that scattered him between the fishing villages of Southern China to Kiribati and the British, French and Irish missions in Fiji.

Being born to a Chinese father excluded him from a traditional I-Kiribati lifestyle and from learning his place in the community through the traditional roles of I-Kiribati men. In addition to his mixed ethnicity, he was also born outside of a culturally recognised union, which added another layer of social exclusion in addition to the other ways in which he was viewed as an outsider. In his early life, therefore, my grandfather was raised mainly by his father, who taught him to fish and to find his way around the land and the sea by smell first of all and then by touch. My grandfather also learnt how to adjust his perception according to his environment, as he moved around so much. Having many ways in which to figure out where he was, or how to get what he needed regarding food and making a living, were necessary to avoid relying on assistance from a culture to which he did not belong and to whose resources he could lay no claim.

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<sup>21</sup> Qalo is the Fijian word for swim, ‘Qalomai’ is to swim here, and the use of this term is for someone who doesn’t belong, someone who swam across from one island to another island, who has no holdings and no standing within the community.

My great grandfather was killed when my grandfather was still quite young, by a swordfish, and my great grandmother was largely ambivalent towards my grandfather. He passed the time amongst other women, as they brushed their hair, oiled and adorned it. Eventually, Father Lejon (also called Father Leone), a French Marist priest, saw that my grandfather was not accepted within the community, and he took my grandfather into his care as a priest's assistant, while providing him with a Christian-based education. My grandfather eventually accompanied Father Le John to Makogai to help care for those diagnosed with leprosy.

Makogai was a leprosarium, with medical and support staff provided mainly by the Christian Church. There, my grandfather met my grandmother ("Bubu" in Fijian) who had been mistakenly diagnosed with leprosy (when in fact she had eczema) and had been removed to Makogai when she was about twelve years old. Teaiwa (2001) wrote: "Makogai...mark[s] our region's inability to cope with radical difference, our collective fear of contamination, and most of all Pacific outcasts' will to survive and share the best of what it means to be human." Makogai was an epicenter of people in a "multicultural polyglot mix", a place where "social outcasts created an early form of what many years later Epeli Hau'ofa would dream of as "a new Oceania" (2001, pp. 302-303), where enormous geographical and cultural distances were connected through the sharing of experiences that were based on faith and compassion between diverse Pacific and

European Peoples. My grandparents were married on Makogai, at the cross roads<sup>22</sup> of the Pacific, brought together in faith and love through their shared experiences of being different.

For the people of Makogai, and my grandparents, forming emotional and spiritual connections with each other empowered them to reject the isolation that was imposed on them. A sense of independence and autonomy arose in the response and the desire to create their own place beyond the geographical, cultural boundaries into which they had been born, and beyond the social categories into which they had been forced. New communities and hybrid cultures arose from their rejection, which discarded the values of the dominant cultures of their homelands that had left no place for them, and forged new places, new identities that enabled them to survive and to flourish.

After my grandparents were married, Bubu had to continue to live on Makogai on and off, as her eczema started to come and go, instead of being there all the time. Because of this, there was a large gap of age and experience between my mother and her brother Leonie (named after Father Leonie) and the rest of the brothers and sisters that came afterwards. Mum and Leonie were placed in the care of Bubu's extended family, many thousands of miles away from Bubu, and did not meet Bubu until Mum was almost a

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<sup>22</sup> Teresia Teaiwa, in a review of a documentary on Makogai, has pointed out the importance of the geographical (and cultural) location of Makogai: "Over the years, the leprosarium served a total of 4,500 patients, who came not only from Fiji, but from the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati), Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, New Zealand (including Maori and Pakeha), the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), and the Solomon Islands. Fiji was deemed centrally placed between the Gilberts to the north, Samoa and Tonga to the east, and New Zealand to the south" (Teaiwa, 2001, p. 303)

teenager. As Bubu spent long periods of time on Makogai, grandfather had to find work wherever he could with different Catholic priests, to remain close enough to Bubu so that he could see her, while being able to fish and send some money to the family to look after Mum and Leone.

Eventually, Bubu was allowed to leave Makogai when her eczema had cleared. Her marriage to my grandfather (a non-Fijian) meant, however, that she did not have anywhere to go, as they were no longer part of the Vola Ni Kawa Bula, or the VKB. The VKB is the Fijian 'Book of Life' which registers the relationship of a Fijian person to their land, their Vanua. The Fijian concept of 'Vanua' takes into account how someone's place in the world is physically, socially, culturally, and politically intertwined with all else and is a patriarchal<sup>23</sup> system. The Vanua structures people's understanding of place in relationship to the land. Ravuvu (as cited in Degei, 2007, p. 13) added that "It refers to the land area with which a person or a group is identified, together with its flora, fauna and other natural constituents. It also means a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another."

For the next few years the family moved around from place to place, depending on the charity of the Catholic church which would give them land and a place to live. They

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<sup>23</sup> Pauline Aucoin (2008, p. 90) has described the dominant representations of gender within Fijian culture:

Authoritative images of male power and superiority are presented, a spatial order that symbolically – and in real terms physically – elevates men above women is instituted, and a dominant system of ritual knowledge that excludes women...is practised.

eventually settled in the little town of Levuka (the old capital of Fiji), one of the strongest white settler communities in Fiji, and home to ethnically and culturally diverse groups of people. This diversity of Levuka suited my grandparents because of the deep prejudice against those who were of mixed ethnicity were, and continue to be, made to feel like members of “invisible cultures”. De Bruce (2008, p. 93) gives her perspective: “As a light-skinned, English-speaking Fijian...anyone who lives and looks like me is relegated to the realm of otherness and prompts those familiar questions, ‘what are you?’ and ‘to which side do you belong?’” To my grandfather, the villagers of Tokou, the village three miles south-east of Levuka town where they lived, would always say, whenever he was around, “Oqori o Luke” (that is Lukè). “E dui dui (he is different or he comes from somewhere else)”. Lucy de Bruce (2008, p. 94) states that the result of this exclusion has been the creation of invisible cultures, invisible people, and by extension, no detectable space or place for them in Fijian culture: “We are invisible by virtue of how others react to us. They do not accept our reality and act as though they do not see us—because the system we live in has been created this way.”

The different types of rejection experienced by my family have been core in the development of their cultural identities and relationships and also core to embodied processes through which cultural continuity has been established in my life here in New Zealand. My grandparents had to find other ways of structuring their relationships to the world around them, building their own little Vanua within the relationships within the family. Their Vanua defied patriarchal norms and created an integrated system that

allowed them to carry their sense of place within their bodies, building social and cultural practices that drew on their experiential knowledge. My grandfather, for example, always made sure that the girls ate at the same time as the boys in the family, and when that was not possible, he would save the best part of the fish – the head, for Mum or Bubu, whichever one would otherwise miss out. Bubu likewise exercised practices that ran contrary to traditional gender role formation, like leaving the haircare practices up to my grandfather. Their experience of a lack of support from the wider Fijian community enabled them to free themselves of some of the cultural constraints of their situation while enduring its rejection, using their knowledge of how breaking out of traditional gender roles could enable them to exercise more choice within their roles within the family, and nurture the value of choice, in the generations to come.

My grandparent's journeys have been embodied in the journeys of my parents, as Mum has left Fiji for Australia and New Zealand, and as my father has left Australia, for Fiji and New Zealand, and travelling the Pacific region in the times in between. The different locations and circumstances of my parents and my grandparent's lives have provided a framework for understanding how my own differences, and the sense of always falling between cultural boundaries, have been important elements in my ongoing recognition of hybridity.

## INTERLUDE

### Home Thoughts From Abroad

*Soft winds from the south are blowing  
And autumnal leaves pile deep,  
As I lie in a far land knowing  
An exile's heart may weep.*

*By the sea at the cliff's foot foaming  
Those soft winds whisper to me  
"Come home dear heart from your roaming  
To the heart that is dearest to thee."*

*From my island a friend is hailing  
"Come back to your native land!"  
It's time that I was sailing  
To take my friend by the hand.*

*So strong are those voices calling,  
So long have I been away,  
I must go while the leaves are falling  
On this golden autumn day,*

*Ere the first snow flies and is blinding,  
And piles in drifts so high  
That the trail is lost past finding,  
And the voices are muffled and die*

*Neil Smith  
Tasmania, 1987*

## PART TWO: PLACING SCENT AND HAIR

*I open the bathroom door and a cloud of heat slips past me, sucked into the cold corridor.*

*'Close the door! Close the door Muffy!' Dad is bent over Mum's small body, sleeves up, pulling and massaging her hair piled in the sink, thick, black, shiny with wet.*

*'Nako mai! Nako mai!' (come here) Papā commands. He takes hold of Mum's hair and rubs the coconut oil into it as much as it is rubbed into coral fish to flavor it. It is mixed with the creamy white flower of the Mokosoi to make sweet and heavy scented pastes of jet black hair dye.*

*Perching on the edge of the toilet to avoid most of the chilly seat, I pee quickly with a squashed bladder, my little brown feet recoiling from the cold bathroom tiles as I watch my father squeeze the last of the water from mum's hair o koya ka digitaki me losea na yaqona<sup>24</sup>.*

*"The coconut oil that we use for our body growing up you just scrape the coconut and dry it and then you squeeze it out then you dry it again in the sun, and then you squeeze it out and then squeeze it out with the coconut husks...that's what they also used for the yaqona, so you squeeze it to get the pure oil and after that so you only have a little bit, half of that, it takes a*

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<sup>24</sup> The person who is chosen to mix the yaqona (kava)

*lot of coconut and you add slowly, grind the Mokosoi or the Uci - the leaves, together and you put it in to the coconut oil... it's so strong and heavy it's beautiful."*

The power of scent, to re-create historical experiences and to evoke memories with an intensity of immediacy, has meant that it has foregrounded all other embodied perspectives in my life, as "odors [have been] unmatched in catalyzing the evocation of distant memories and places" (Drobnick, 2006, p. 1).

Scent has been a measure of time, place and occasion and a mapper of what I have termed, a 'geo-sensual' landscape. My mother and my grandparents have used scent, and in particular, the scent of the sea and of flowers, to tell where they are, and who they are. They have also used scent to understand time, both in terms of the time of day and time as it is related to social behaviour; smell is "an emotional, arousing sense" (Porteous, 2006, p. 89) and so it has been particularly powerful in the fine tuning of expectations and assumptions within different social occasions.

Mum has passed these ways of knowing on to my brother and I, through creating scented cultural worlds to teach us a sense of time and social occasion in our upbringing here in New Zealand. From the construction of personal identity, where scents have facilitated intimacy of understanding between members of my family, to the nurturing of physical and emotional health, and to the defining of my family's social status in Fiji, scents have been involved in just about every aspect of our cultural life.

## **A Lifetime of Scent**

From as early as I can remember, Dad would always buy Mum perfume, either on the plane or going through the airport or department stores. He loved her with the gift of perfume, and the ritual of unwrapping the perfume boxes would consist of us gathering around, watching as the plastic was torn off, and the inhalation of that first breath of the new scent would be heavily anticipated and heavenly.

After I was born, Mum suffered from intense, regular migraines until I was well into my twenties. Dad used to regularly massage Mum, using particular combinations of scents and creams to aid her relief. Mum would spend a long time in darkness, with only a restricted band of scents permissible, sometimes for days. Since Dad's death, massaging Mum with peppery smelling oils has been a way of aiding transition in grief as well as giving her relief from physical and emotional exhaustion. Although Mum was already raised with a significant emphasis on smells – in terms of telling time and location, – both on land and at sea, her increased sensitivity through migraines meant that my brother and I were raised with an acute responsiveness to scents.

Mum would often buy perfume for herself as well, from shops, vendors, gift stores and wherever she could find it. She would bring home new and old scents in glass bottles, spray bottles, squeezy bottles, and tiny bottles. Even empty perfume bottles would not

lose their value, especially the expensive ones, but they would sometimes be kept for years, to perfume clothes and empty drawers with what little drops they had at the bottom of the bottle, or to stand on a dresser somewhere and remind Mum of the perfumes she has had in the past. I've inherited my mother's love for scent, for perfume, for burning oils, for mixing my own scents, and spraying myself liberally every time I walk out the door. The house would always be filled with some scent or another, of sandalwood, rosehip, lemongrass or musk, of vanilla bean, jasmine, mango, bergamot, frangipani and coconut. We would always be able to smell each other or smell what the time was (dinner time, time to go to work, time to sleep) before touching each other or taking notice of what we were wearing or anything else. I cannot but think of my mother, and I smell her.

Throughout my life, my Mum has oriented her daily life and self-appraisals around scents, employing scent to tell time and direction, reinforce family roles and responsibilities, to heighten awareness of social occasions and to create and reinforce a strong sense of who she is. Her relationship with scent, and in particular, the scent of the sea and of particular flowers and plants, has been shaped by the importance of scent in the lives of my grandparents.

## The Sea

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)  
It's always ourselves we find in the sea

e.e. cummings  
(‘maggie and milly and molly and may’)

My grandfather lived through the sea.

It was his life, and it also came to be the way that he died.

In his relationship with the sea he would come to rely heavily on scent. Different sea scents would enable him to carry out risk assessment of the weather and condition of the ocean, giving him the knowledge he needed to maintain his role as provider and protector of his family. Bubu would rely on scent to foster a personal identity and an understanding of social expectations. Mum has integrated this use of scent in her life here in Palmerston North, and used scent to communicate a sensation and appreciation of a place and a home that is connected to her life in Levuka, Fiji. In his chapter ‘Smellscape’ Porteous (2006) has described the olfactory landmarks or “smellmarks” (p. 92), by which difference, locations, identities and distances can be detected through the particularities of smell:

Continents, countries, regions, neighbourhoods...and houses have their particular smell scales. I can recall, for example, the exotic smells of India; the wild herb

scents of rural Greece; the peculiar odor of Humberside mud; the smells of horse, sea and grass on Easter Island; Italian pasta and aniseed in Boston's North end; Arab and Chinese food in its South end; the cedar kindling and dried alder in my woodshed. (Porteous, 2006, p. 96)

As well as telling my grandfather his location, the sea would also tell my grandfather the time, depending on environmental changes in the weather and the sea, and whether there were any threats to his family and his ability to protect and provide for them. This sense of smell defined my grandfather's role as protector and provider for his family:

*Mum: My father, could smell the sea from wherever we were like in the plantation when we working he would say to me I can feel and smell the air, so we would, he would say we better hurry so we could go down to the beach and bring the boat in because otherwise the boat would be out tossing and out in the sea...he could smell the mist of the sea and the heaviness of the dark clouds...and we would still be fast asleep and Papa would say the sea is coming in now, I can smell it...he could smell the sea at different times, the tide is just coming in, the tide is just going out, the tide will be full on such and such a time...*

My grandfather would also map both his geographical location as well as his maritime identity, by being able to smell different things about the sea. The sea was scented differently, in different locations, and he used these smells to tell where he was. The sea would also be scented according to where particular species of fish could be found.

*Mum: he could tell where certain type of fish would be by the smell of the sea at different area we would be travelling he could smell a certain type of heaviness in the sea, um, different like the colour of the sea and the smell of the sea at particular points in the ocean, also the smell of corals on the reef, he could smell the reef, I could smell the reef and I would learn how to tell oh it's the reef um, over there, or near us, is not dry completely dry, because the weather hasn't come fully, or closing in.*

The greater my grandfather's intimacy with the sea, the better able he was to maintain control over his life and the life of his family, and thereby maintain and strengthen his place in the world. Smell took my grandfather over the surface of the ocean and within it, sensing life and direction on the water that went below its visible surface. Scent surrounds a person, giving them the ability to sense their own being in the world in more than one way. This multidimensional aspect of scent was crucial to my grandfather's capacity to think 'beyond' appearances and gain a sense of self, direction, and geographical location that was expansive.

## **Flowers**

A flower's fragrance....reminds us in vestigial ways of fertility, vigor, life-force, all the optimism, expectancy, and passionate bloom of youth. We inhale its ardent aroma and, no matter what our ages, we feel young and nubile in a world aflame with desire.

*Diane Ackerman (1990, p. 13)*

Like the sea, flowers were also very significant as a way of understanding time, like daytime and nighttime, geographical distance, and a way of differentiating between social occasions. On her way to tending the plantation, Mum would walk the distance with Bubu, through smells, marking the journey there and back, and the proximity to work and home, with the bursting blooms and freshness and mustiness of scent.

*Mum: as we walked along the smell of the woods, the smell of the woods and the smell of the leaves the clean leaves, the rotting leaves...and then mum would say oh can you smell that, I said no, yeah just stand there, come here move over here and smell over here Oh! It's nice sweet smell and she said that's the smell of the Mokosoi that we are going to pick on our way home so that we can use it for the...oil, for our oil, and as we walk along, oh! Can you smell that, and I said no? That's the smell of the flowers of the mango trees just coming into bloom, and even the coconut flowers*

Scent would also provide a transition between night and day and social expectations. As the sun set and the heat of the day lingered on the night air, the darkness intensified the heavy set smell of the night time flowers. The absence of light and the accumulation of the sea spray in the air over the day would infuse the night flowers and bring out the intensity of their scent even more. Night time scents would aid Mum in her self-appraisals, her ability to understand and take the measure of social expectations in different situations like a social dance or a church function for example, especially if

those occasions were outside of the family home and involved other people of mixed ethnicity.

*Mum: It makes me feel good...mum always put the perfume on us after shower because she said oh this will make you feel good and you feel clean and good and also nice and she says that we girls should feel good about ourselves when we go out and Papa would say yeah you attract the boys and then you have problems! (laughing) and beside to have beautiful oils in Fiji, it's quite an attractive, not everybody wears it, because they don't know how to make it*

The social expectations of those of mixed ethnicity differed from those of Fijians, and many of those expectations were negative because of their 'outsider status'. For example, sexual promiscuity was (and continues to be) an expectation held of those of mixed ethnicity and the looseness of family ties that can accompany that, as part of the dominant group's perception of half-caste or Kailoma status<sup>25</sup>. Although my mother was not a Kailoma (but I am seen as that), she and her family were still recognised as not belonging in the same way that a Kailoma does not belong, and their Kiribati and Chinese ethnicity made it even more certain that, at any available opportunity, they would become a talking point amongst other people in Levuka and the surrounding villages.

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<sup>25</sup> This kind of expectation, placed on those of half-caste status, was a legacy of institutionalized prejudice installed in the political infrastructure of Fiji during the colonial period. Lucy De Bruce (2007, 2008) has written on the introduction of racial discrimination into Fiji, when white people, who did not want to have their power in Fiji eroded by Kailoma, created a system whereby Kailoma were separated from Fijians and brought up in different social and educational systems.

In order to minimize the impact of their outsider status on their living situation, it was extremely important, more so than normal, that Mum retain the ‘spotless’ image of the family, in order to not fall in with public expectations that ‘that is what mixed people do’, and in order to retain their sense of difference on which their sense of identity was built. It was therefore very important that the slightest indiscretions were managed through processes that enabled a deep appreciation of both their connection to their environment, and their separation from that. The oils, being derived from their physical environment, provided a sense of integrity with the land and the sea, regardless of whether or not that was recognised by other people. This deep connection based on smell was also what provided the impetus then for understanding their place in the society in which they lived, in a private way that was shared only amongst the immediate family. This deep connection was abiding and long term, it enabled a personal and collective understanding amongst the family, and the girls in particular, of the kind of decorum would make things more or less easy for the family, and their place in Fijian society.

Scents have been the way in which Mum has navigated us (my brother, my father and I) through her memories and our cultural histories, providing geo sensual maps of land and place, that like my grandparent’s sense of Vanua which they have carried in their bodies, have been carried in our bodies too. Porteous (2006, p. 91) has pointed out that “smells environ. They penetrate the body and permeate the immediate environment”, which

means that through scents a physical and emotional connection with my past is maintained and lived, whereby my whole body knows the homelands of my ancestors and to this knowledge my body can be exposed time and time again.

The proliferation of scents in my life have created a physical place, an invisible and deeply internalized sense of ‘home’ that continues outside of the physical boundaries of my home in Palmerston North, and is accessible to me wherever I go. Like James Michener (1974 as cited in Porteous, 2006, p. 102) has described, in his memories of travel, “if I smell burnt chicory I am in Fiji, if I smell clean ocean fish, I am in the Tahiti market, or a whiff of burnt sulphur can pitch me back into the sugar factories of Queensland”. The only real difference between my experiences and Michener’s is that through scents, I have fabricated those memories of a home that I did not come to see until I was twenty one.

The various contexts of scent in my life, in massaging Mum, in getting ready to go out, in the combing and oiling of hair that I describe in the next section of this chapter, in the sheer and constant presence of fragrances everywhere in the house and always on and around my mother, has created a sensation of home that is understood, “not by sight, but by taste, touch and smell” stated Chinn, referring to the home island of Carriacou that Audre Lorde never sees: “the heavy smell of limes,” “the taste of guava jelly and of ‘chalky brown nuggets of pressed chocolate’”, the “sweet-smelling tonka bean” (Chinn, 2003, p. 187).

My memories of home are not memories in the normal sense, because they have come to me before I went to Fiji. But they are still memories because they are connections to historical processes of my mother's cultural identity construction, the crossing of physical, social and cultural boundaries that have brought me to New Zealand. They are memories in an imaginary sense, placing me in what has truly felt like home, the first time I arrived (back) in Fiji.

The next vignette, 'Deviant Hair', mingles scent with rhythmic touch, through the combing, brushing and oiling of hair. Rhythmic touch has shaped my understandings of how people prioritise in life, and how cross cultural understandings can be created through the establishment of shared rhythms.

## **Deviant Hair**

*"How did grandpa decide how to cut your hair?" I ask.*

*"Oh no, no, there's no decision! He would put his hand on my head and go schtuck schtuck',*

*Mum mimes, scissoring wild shapes in the air between us.*

*....and my mother would say "Ma! What's happened to your hair?! Ma! o cei a kotia na ulumu? Na mataqali sitaili (style) vakacava na ulumu?! (What kind of a style is your hair is?!) I say, au sega ni kila! (I don't know!)", Mum, bewildered, puts her hands on her head, "What's wrong? Papā cut it!"*

*Joana<sup>26</sup>: Lukè! Mataqali sitaili vakacava ko cakava vei Ma? (What kind of style did you do on Ma's head?)*

*Lukè<sup>27</sup>: O sitaili vinaka! (It's a good style!)*

*Joana: Ko raica mai vei? (Where did you see this kind of style?)*

*Lukè: Au raica ena niusipepa (newspaper) kau mai kina na madrai (From the newspaper that came with the bread, the newspaper the bread was wrapped in). And my mother would be laughing her head off, and she would be saying Lukè sa mataboko sara ga o iko! (You can't see!)*

*"It would be just one piece of newspaper the bread was wrapped in, then my mother would just shook her head and say, 'oh sobo o sobo va loloma sara ga o iko I feel pity you know I'm sorry for you, I have pity for you and then my Pa would say, 'oh don't worry too much it will grow again".*

*"Okay Froggie, your turn" Dad turns to me, after he is finished with mum's hair, plaiting it into a strong rope tied at the top and bottom with coloured ties if she isn't going to wear her hair up with a flower in it that day. The air hangs with perfume and drops of scented coconut oil that Mum has melted in her hands and rubbed into her hair. I get my hairbrush out of mum's drawer and sit down between Dad's legs, as he sits down on the edge of his and Mum's bed. Big hands gently tug apart the knots and curls in my hair.*

*'You think that's why I did Dad's hair?'*

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<sup>26</sup> Joana is my grandmother's Anglicised name. Her Fijian name is Kesaia.

<sup>27</sup> Luke Amon is my grandfather's name.

*'Yes, you would play with your father's hair', Mum agrees cheerfully, 'All the time. And sometimes I think I could see Daddy getting annoyed but he was very patient with you... It was him that looked after your hair. He would go (making long brushing motions) he just loved it, he enjoyed it.*

Touch has been fundamental, like scent and smell, to creating an understanding of place. The significant modes of touch in the vignette above are centered on practices of hair maintenance and beautification, such as oiling, washing, brushing, combing and creating hair styles. Touch has been a way of embedding the rhythms (of ocean life) and its resources (shells, oils, plant life) of different physical environments within the dynamics of the relationships in my family, fostering a feeling of connection and one-ness between people and their physical and cultural environment, enabling a more sensitive "cultural attunement" (Hoskins, 1999, p. 73) to the rhythms of others.

Marie Hoskins (1999) has used the concept of cultural attunement, "as a way of being in relation with 'other'". She has described certain principles that she believes are important in cultural attunement such as "engaging in acts of humility, acting with reverence and engaging in mutuality" (p. 73). These principles have been enacted in my life through touch, as part of the overall function of touch as an "access to 'truth', [coming] as close as possible to appropriating the full bodied experience of the nature of another person's existence" (Classen, 2005, p. 277).

## Caring for Hair

*If you don't know what to do,  
Just put your hands on them and love them*

(Pannatier as cited in Sayre-Adams, Wright, & Biley, 2001, p. ix)

The mode of touch, when caring for hair in Fijian and Kiribati culture, is predominantly smooth and repetitive and directed towards caring for people, inside and out. The significance placed on the rhythmic motion of brushing and combing hair mimics the rhythms of an oceanic environment, embedding an understanding of the importance of these rhythms in living a life of harmony with others in both cultures<sup>28</sup>. The repetitive nature of hair combing reflects the glistening, quiet wash of shore on the sheltered and drought ridden lagoons of the Southern Yasawas in Fiji, or the sparkling, relentless bellow of the breakers in Kiribati where, “there is nowhere, not even in the centre of the lagoon, that the incessant roar of the breakers is not heard. The sound of the sea is inescapable in Kiribati. Sea dominates life - this is a world of water” (Whincup, 2010, p. 116).

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<sup>28</sup> In Skinscapes, David Howes (2005b, p. 13) investigates how “environmental perceptions and social value are imprinted on skin in indigenous and Western cultures. The Trobriand Islanders, on the other hand, who wish to expand their connections with people on neighbouring islands, value a smooth, supple skin that invites touching”.



Figure 7 Land in Kiribati

(Whincup, 2008)

The constant tidal movements and sound of water is reinforced in the cyclical nature of the rhythms of hair care. Amongst Kiribati women, nurturing the health, feel and appearance of hair is something that is always present in social life, fundamentally arranging relationships, intimacy and social understanding amongst people like the ocean fundamentally determines the mode of life in Kiribati.

Kathleen Wilson (2003) has explored “therapeutic landscapes”<sup>29</sup> which although is a Western concept is used by Wilson to challenge Western concepts through exploring the (First Nations peoples) Anishinabek’s concepts of landscape within social relationships

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<sup>29</sup> Wilson (2003)explains that therapeutic landscapes as a concept is very much a Western conceptualization which does not typically allow for other ways of understanding the link between health and place that do not focus on landscapes that are mainly important in Western cultures (e.g. spas and baths), “yet their healing benefits are presented as holding universal meanings” (p. 84). In her article, Wilson challenges this universality of meaning and further examines the meaning of therapeutic landscapes in people’s everyday lives.

and particularly within the concept of health. Anishinabek health is not just physiological health in a Western sense (going to the gym, the doctor's or naturopath's) but health in relationships with others: "good health and healing also requires that an individual live in harmony with others, their community and the spirit worlds" (Malloch as cited in Wilson, 2003, p. 87). Living in harmony with others is intricately tied to a notion of health in relationships with the land where the land is provider, healer, place-giver, and maintainer of spiritual integration with creation which places the land in the sustenance of life and relationships between people as the Anishinabek's know it. Medicine, for instance, that which restores balance and harmony between the elements is as much spiritual as physical:

Herbal medicines can't be arranged like Western medicine because there is a spiritual component which becomes weaker when it is analyzed....Western medicine is the physical, mental, emotional but not the spiritual. I find it's not there. In the Native world everything comes from the heart. That's where it is. (Wilson, 2003, p. 89)

The health of social relationships then is nurtured through and by a communion with the land, where the "land is not just seen as shaping or influencing identity, but being an actual part of it" (Wilson, 2003, p. 88). Hence, to be cut off from the Vanua is to be cut off from the greatest source of health and happiness in life for a Fijian person.

Our family had strong connections with the Kiribati communities in the village of Levuka Va Vakaviti. Mum remembers how women would often be engaging with each other and nurturing their social ties, through combing each other's hair.

*Mum: Whenever I would go to Levuka Va Viti I would see them combing, combing, brushing using the coconut shells as well as the turtle shells but mostly the coconut shells, taku they call it...And I remember the kids used there would be one kid here and another one here and another kid would be brushing out the tail of the hair because it's so long!*

Mum remembers the long flowing movements of Uwaua's hair, one of our Kiribati family in Levuka Va Viti:

*I always admire this woman because she would have beautiful straight shiny long hair and she was beautiful...she was Bubu's height and her name was Uwaua...She was always spotless, combing her hair, combing her coconut hair, shiny and the turtle shell comb that she used to comb her hair with and would hold her hair up and when she would let it down it would be beyond her bottom.*

Nurturing particular aesthetics of hair, such as its long length and smooth texture, contributes to the physical, emotional and spiritual nurturing of the ties between people and land, in the idealization of beauty reflecting the long lines of unbroken horizons and the flat lines of sandy shores that stretch out and disappear into the sea. Maintaining the shape and nature of the physical environment in hair is a way of maintaining the deep understanding of, and respect for, their place within their physical environment, the

dependence on it for their survival and way of being, in the same way and to the same degree that dependence on social and cultural environments is necessary for survival and lifestyle as well. Learning and engaging in principled interaction with each other, through the integration of the environment within the nature of social relationships, means that the different forms of understanding needed, to approach cross cultural interactions with humility, reverence and mutuality (Hoskins, 1999) are learnt and performed through engaging all forms of one's being in the world, in direct connection with others.

The attention paid to touching and caring for my hair has embodied the places and landscapes of my family's journeys across Fiji and Kiribati, and here to New Zealand, and shaped my understanding of social relationships and belonging within a community. Practices of hair have been adapted to my life here in New Zealand. There were many times here, especially as a child, where I would crawl amongst groups of Fijian women, to find my Mum or my (Chinese Fijian) Godmother, Aunty Ako and be brought to awareness of a different rhythm, a different environment, a different way of life.

*Tilting my gaze from out of Aunty Ako's embrace to watch the upward strokes of the spiky combs of the women, as they teased the tight raised curls straight up and out from their heads, I wonder what they are doing that for. 'It can't be making much difference to anything', I think. I contemplate what I might be missing as I listen to the shush shush of the thick hair as it buzzes and stretches through the plastic teeth.*

Hair “is shaped and re-shaped by social convention” Mercer (1990, p. 252) points out, which also includes conventions of gender roles. Hair has created opportunities to reshape traditional expectations of male and female roles in Fijian and Kiribati cultures in Mum’s life, and in mine, and also mainstream Western perspectives of male roles within my family as well. In Mum’s upbringing, my grandfather was the main caretaker of the health and beauty of hair in the family, which was a reflection of his upbringing within Kiribati culture, and their place within the Kiribati community in Levuka. In his life in Kiribati, my grandfather was nurtured more by women, than by men, and therefore given the opportunity to gain a deeper insight than otherwise available, into the benefits of transcending and blending cultural expectations of gender roles, within traditional Kiribati and Fijian cultures. It was unusual for a male to tend to hair.

*Mum: They do each other's hair, older Kiribati women always looking after the young women's hair. I didn't see men doing it, only Pa would do my hair*

But my grandfather drew on his sense of belonging, which was gained through his participation in the routines of women in the Kiribati community in which he spent his early life, to extend a feeling to Mum’s brothers and sisters, of being able to identify with Kiribati culture. By showing ongoing care for the family’s hair, he cultivated a feeling and recognition of place in the Kiribati community within Levuka, as well as within the Kiribati Islands.

In our life here in Palmerston North, Dad has held the responsibility for combing and tending to my hair and Mum's hair, especially as I was growing up. The amount of care and investment by my father in my hair has reinforced my grandfather's role in Mum's life, and continued it in mine.

The themes that I have covered in this section on hair and scent relate to the integral role that differences and similarities play in the construction of hybrid cultural identity. The blending of different cultural meanings and understandings, within the sensuous processes of hair care and scent create different cultural identities at the same time, reinforcing their inseparability.

The next section elaborates on the formation of my own cultural aesthetics of body shape and appearance, and how that has allowed me to integrate Western values into my life. I focus, in particular, on Ballet and the insights that Ballet has provided me of the value of autonomy and a strong sense of individuality that is grounded within the history of my parent's rejection from different cultural contexts and the development of cross cultural practices that have enabled them to survive and to thrive.

## PART THREE: DANCING CULTURES AND THE SONGS WE SING

*"I was always involved in the school dance. Being the leader, the nuns would always pick me for that, in the way of like when a group dance is happening. When we do a group dance someone always calls out cuva! Let's bow! Or kaila! Let's shout! Or tau lade! Let's jump! the one who is in charge of the little group." I see the exuberance has not faded, even the littlest bit, her love for dance stirring her to smile and gently sketch the actions.*

*"So that's essentially why you wanted me to start dancing then?" I ask her.*

*"Yes." Mum nods enthusiastically. The nuns would always give that leading part to me because I like singing and dancing and I really enjoyed it. Dancing was really a part of me-growing up-and I felt because of that I could give that to my daughter."*

*"Did Grandpa dance?" I search for images or feelings of him as a dancing man.*

*"Oh yeah, especially when he has yaqona<sup>30</sup>", and Mum laughs. "But he would always dance anyway, without yaqona. He would enjoy watching the Gilbertese in the village dance and at home he would show me the differences between Fijian dance and Gilbertese. Gilbertese are known as the best dancers in the Pacific because of their perfect unison."*

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<sup>30</sup> "Yaqona, kava, or often 'grog'... is grown and drunk in all parts of the Pacific. The beverage is the colour of muddy water and can be prepared by pounding either the roots (waka) or the stem (lawena) into a powder and then mixing it with water. Traditionally, amongst indigenous Fijians, yaqona was drunk as a central part of ceremonial occasions.... It is common at social gatherings, such as marriages, parties or small get-togethers" (Mangal, 1998, p. 59)

*I think back to the book 'Akekeia' by Whincup & Whincup (2001) where there is a shot of the steam rising from a freshwater inland pool, in which the I-Kiribati women secretly danced and practised their synchronicity. The resistance of the water against their bodies keeps time, forcing a relatively uniform slowness across the group, giving them the same amount of space and equipresence of strength and energy to refine their group movements to perfection.*

The development and cultivation of a Western body aesthetic and style of movement in ballet has run contrary, in many ways, to how my body is naturally shaped and how the body moves within a Fijian cultural environment. Within ballet a Western aesthetic of individuality, autonomy and a striving towards personal responsibility is valued, in order to focus one's attention on one's body and extracting the best from it that the art of ballet demands.

On the other hand, within Fijian culture, an aesthetic that values connection and collective responsibility for the body is valued, in order to focus one's attention on other people's bodies, and outwards towards the whole social network, in order to contribute to the well-being of oneself by contributing to the well-being of others. The tension within this aesthetic, and the integration of the values of both into my life, resonate within my cultural identity, connecting me to the cultural identity journeys of my parents and grandparents, and particularly – when I exert or experience a strong sense of individualism in my life - the theme of cultural rejection.

## **Body Shape Ideals: Fijian Culture and Ballet**

The aesthetics of ballet date back to French court dance of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The leading aspiration of the time was to reach towards the ideal of heaven, which at that time, needed almost complete mastery and control of one's body according to gender ideals. The qualities associated with that were lightness or airy-ness, extreme thin-ness in women, or lean and strong in men, and until more recently, a whiteness of skin. The whole impression to be given in ballet was to be close enough to angelic form as possible, so that it would be hard to imagine that a ballet dancer would be otherwise than otherworldly. Dancers are required "to sculpt their bodies into a cultural form" (Aalten, 1997, p. 48) that can distance them from the imperfections and realities of life, and bring them closer to heavenly ideals.

Ballet therefore encourages a perspective on the body as an object from which one distances oneself from influences that may take detract from the ability to control and master the required form (2005). There is a strong element of competitiveness here also, whereby competition with one's own natural form is just as strong as competition with the bodies of others to look as good or better than anyone else. Grau (2005, p. 6) explains that "through history ballet dancers [have come] to look upon their bodies as tools that can be stretched, bent, starved or whatever in order to push the boundaries of the technique.

Within Fijian culture there is quite a different perspective on the body, one that is not so self-directed or self interested, nor competitive, and much more focused outwards from the self, directed towards the bodies of other people. Ballet imposes a strong sense of distance between a person and their sense of self. The self is separate or apart from other people (social networks) which is necessary to maintain a perspective of control and objectivity, because that is what is valuable in striving for success within the Western aesthetic of ballet. But within Fijian culture, what is valuable is not distance between people, but closeness, where the body is that which maintains this closeness, through its nurturing and its capacity to be cared for by others. Becker (1995, p. 57) writes that the "relative lack of interest in cultivating one's body is grounded in the understanding that personal achievements are indexed not by bodily shape or the disciplining of the body, but by one's connectedness with and performance of care in the social matrix of the family, the mataqali<sup>31</sup>, and the village."

Directing attention away from one's own body and towards that of other people's is to direct one's attention towards the whole network and context in which a person exists and to direct one's efforts therefore towards sustaining those networks as well. The body is the grounding force, like touch in landscape, where it carries the connection between the environment or the land, and the social relationships that are arranged within and by that.

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<sup>31</sup> Meaning 'tribe'

*The air is heavy with salt from the sea, lapping at the open spaces behind the audience and glimmering with the sweat of the dancers curving underneath the artificial lighting. Their thighs and calves connect with a floor littered with rags of fresh banana leaves and dried mulberry, flicking out their dusty smells, ripped from the anklets of the dancers, scattering themselves across the parquet floor.*

The Fijian body is valued similarly to how the Vanua is valued; it is placed at the nexus of the natural, the divine, the social and the cultural world. The land, the ground, is the nurturing force from which food springs. Even the ocean, which sits on top of the land, is thought of in the same terms, so there is much emphasis put on sustaining one's position in relation to the land, within social relationships – 'keeping both feet on the ground', so to speak. For example, in Fijian dance there is a lot of movement where both men and women sit on the floor, connecting them with as great a surface area as possible with the land, and through this shared connection, with each other as well. It is rather rare to see much classical ballet take place where the body is in fulsome contact with floor.

## **Challenging Cultures**

Defying the aesthetics of my body shape through ballet has been a way of learning how to challenge social expectations in different situations. Being of mixed identity, and not fitting into physical stereotypes within Fijian culture, has created tensions through which I have had to negotiate. This has required me to understand many different kinds

of social and cultural expectations in my life, in order to maintain a sense of agency, as much as possible.

*Mum: We didn't just want you to learn that what's in the home is all that's important or that it's the only way that you should learn that there are rules and regulations in life, that to join a disciplined group like ballet where precision is required to the very tip of your toes you might realize that life - it's also a life of rules and regulations not just inside the home.*

Aalten states that Ballet is about “challeng[ing] the law of gravity”, (Aalten, 1997, p. 47), and I have extended the concept of gravity to mean cultural and social norms. When growing up within and between many different cultural contexts, to maintain a sense of control and choice over my direction in life, it has been necessary to deeply understand cultural norms that both aid and prevent me from achieving my personal goals. Anne Becker (2004) has written about what has happened when dominant cultures have taken too much advantage of cultural vulnerabilities or weaknesses during times of great social and economic transition, and the impact of this in Fiji. She has examined the impact of Western images of beauty on the eating habits of Fijian adolescent girls, noting that the sudden prevalence of a White aesthetic through the mass media, has contributed to a marked increase in indicators of disordered eating.

The resistance needed in ballet to challenge what the body is capable of, trains the mind and the soul too, to always question the forces that are at work in my life. Ballet places my curvy figure as “a ‘thing’ that never conforms” (Grau, 2005, p. 6) within the cultural tensions between Western values of individualism and Fijian values of social relationships. Sometimes these tensions and conflicts can be overwhelming, and as Becker has found, can have very destructive effects on self-image and understanding about processes of identity construction. While ballet has given me a strong sense of independence and control, these values have been exercised within the context of my family, through my family’s involvement in every stage of ballet – from the styling of my hair, to the picking up and dropping off to classes, exams, regional competitions, and other events.

*Mum: We didn’t want you to only be a Pacific Islander and do Pacific Island things, because if that’s the only thing you know, outside of that, you get rejected. And that’s the underlying thing that brought me back to what the rejection was – the rejection of the family back home. I didn’t want them, I didn’t want you to be immersed in Fijian and that includes the dance, because Mum said to me several times, ‘Ma [Maria], they don’t want us. Why bother?’ I wanted you to know through your dancing, that all that we were was good enough for anybody, and most of all, for ourselves.*

In the next section, I describe my experiences of singing with Fijian and Western Catholic cultural contexts. I focus on how music has positioned me differently within cultures, according to the way in which music organizes social structures and mediates social and cultural dynamics.

## **Just Let Me Sing**

*I look at Mum, guilt bursting against my insides. Dad is enraged, yelling at us from behind the wheel as he drove us home from Sunday morning mass. In between his admonitions Mum wept.*

*"Does it matter?! Does it matter?! Why can't I sing? Why can't you just leave me to sing! Every time we go to mass, every time you tell me off you tell me not to sing you ask why I have to sing that way," Mum cries. Up until then I was too young and selfish to understand what it meant to her.*

*Dad is getting angrier.*

*"Are you happy now? Does it make you happy that you've hurt your mother?! Look at her, look what you've done. You can't just let her enjoy herself, you can't support her. You know how important it is to her, you know how happy it makes her and yet you're too selfish to let her have it."*

*We sing as the night passes, just Mum and I, alone with Dad. We remain singing, until the room becomes light and the last shadows of warmth leave him and until there is movement in*

*the corridor outside as the rest of the world awoke. We sing him, and ourselves, into another place and time.*

*When one person picks up a ukulele and strums it, one person comes over. And then they sing together, or he picks up the tune from him. And then another person comes. And then in less than an hour you have about six or seven people gathered around that one coconut ukulele, singing.*

Within Fijian culture and within my life here in New Zealand, singing is the cherishing of life with my whole being. It is the purest and highest expression of the happiness to be found in being alive, and in being together with other people.<sup>32</sup>

Musical traditions, that have encompassed Fijian, Kiribati and Western cultures, have created avenues of sound along which memories of different places and times have been passed on to me through my mother. The significance of harmony and creating one's place in the music together with other people, embeds in a person's being the significance of living harmoniously with each other, and the importance of nurturing social relationships – that which is most highly valued in Fijian culture.

Within Fijian and Western Catholic contexts, singing has surrounded me with knowledge and understanding of social relationships that stretch into the distant past – spiritual,

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<sup>32</sup> "The Fijian word for "happy" (*maraū*) also refers to traditional singing and dancing"(West, 1988, p. 19)

ancestral places and spaces - fashioning a place for me within a community that knows no boundaries of time, place or space.

## Tuning In

All around me, people are singing - sopranos, altos, tenors and basses. Each voice has a place in the harmony. Especially notable is the power of the male voices, providing the bass notes of the chords...I join in the singing and immediately find a "place" for my voice. I am an insider in a familiar culture and an outsider in an unfamiliar culture...Fijian language, ethnicity and social structures, such as views on land ownership and commercial and political practices, are unfamiliar to me. What is familiar, however, is the musical experience itself: the order of service, the hymn tunes, the nature and intensity of feeling that come from singing in harmony with men and women, with no instruments to obscure our voices...the singing that I heard and participated in was always in harmony, whether it was two people singing at a bus stop or group singing in more organized contexts. How is it, I asked myself, that so many people are able to sing in harmony, and are disposed to do so? (Russell, 2001, pp. 197-199)

The answer to Russell's question lies in the value placed in harmonious living. Singing in the Fijian way emphasises listening, a "tuning in" to each other's places in the music, in order to contribute to where one feels the best fit – in voice and technique. Musical arrangements are people arrangements; a system of harmonics built as much on social relationships as acoustic ones. The richness of the layering and depth of social relationships, the enormous emphasis placed on the importance of nurturing and cultivating one's ties to another human being is held in the totality of harmony that is created within the group. The richness and complexity of harmony is like an acoustic net, holding the knowledge of the richness and complexity of social relationships.

Singing in harmony provides, for as long as the music lasts, a place where ethnic and cultural differences are forgotten and made way for, in the richness of sound. Diversity and difference are a good thing, adding to the layers and depths of the body of music being produced by the group, extending membership to whoever can find where they fit in. Harmony was the only way in which Mum could find a place in Fijian culture where she was connected with her whole being. Where, for the moment that the song lasted, her differences were forgotten, blended and woven together with others in a soundscape that was stripped of any cultural and social prejudice that accompanied all other forms of social activity and interaction in her life.

*Mum: The singing that I was brought up with in the village and also in boarding schools and also when I was still very young I remember that it gave the sound of sweetness and joy to all who are singing, I felt pure exhilaration of being able to hear that person's voice blended with my voice and other voices all around, it gave that uplifting of soul, uplifting of body and the joy of that moment was magic. The balance of hearing the sound from the person next to you or further away from you, the mixing of voices and the different levels of intonation, nobody practices but people listen to the sound that so and so was producing and matches the voice that this person is coming out with and everyone tries to fit in to make a perfect balance in the song that is being sung at that moment.*

The village singing of Mum's life, has been re-created within my life here in New Zealand, encompassing different communities in different settings that at any one time would likely include those of Fijian, Chinese, Indian and Samoan descent, singing together late into the night at frequent BBQ's or celebrations at someone's house. I would often remember these songs for years, never knowing what the words meant but still remembering the tunes, and feeling the power of sounding them out in unison with other people. I would sing until I fell asleep, my head on Mum's lap, my ears filled with the thick, resonating harmonies of the people around me, my body embraced by the warmth of those around me. I am at home amongst the voices of my family, singing me to sleep.

It is not always necessary to be able to make a sound in order to sing either, as those who listen are just as important. For example, growing up, and to this day, we would say our night prayers together as a family. During these night prayers, we would always sing – Mum, my brother and I. Although Dad couldn't sing, and neither was he religious in any way, Dad would sing with his body - the postures that he would adopt when we would sing together. He would sit back in his chair and listen to us, and with the relaxed position of his body, and his closed eyes, he would be singing as well. It would be a harmony of silence, the gaps that bounded the phrases of sound that were filled with the quiet presence of my Dad.

I have carried these memories and experiences with me into the meaning that Western musical structures and traditions have gained for me, particularly within the music of the

Catholic mass in New Zealand and my role as a cantor. Although there are notions of particular vocal roles in Fijian cultural group singing, there is no notion or equivalent position of a solo cantor within the music of the Fijian Catholic mass, either in musical relationships and styles, or in the understanding of the role of music in the mass.

Feld (1984, p. 7) makes the point that “when we first listen we ‘lock in’ and ‘shift’ our attention, so that the sounds polarize toward structures or history in our minds.”

Hearing music from the perspective of a cantor directs my understanding of music and its meaning as it has been created amongst my experiences of singing within a Fijian community. The sound of cantor singing is separate and apart from the congregation. From a Western perspective, cantoring maintains the distance between the cantor and the congregation, while bringing the people along or into the parts of the mass, and into their prayer, as needed. But within Fijian culture, singing does not separate people or divide them into specific roles; it binds them together, through the emotional intensity provided in the singing. Establishing an emotional connection with the music, through my own experiences and memories of singing in general, is then what allows me, as a cantor, the space to connect and empathise with the congregation, to sing from their perspective, rather than from my own, or one that is separate from theirs.

The Catholic mass encompasses a community present of those living and dead, and within Fijian culture, singing in the context of Christian rituals of death, and especially Catholic requiem masses, are also a way of communicating one’s place and relationship

with those gone. I have been privileged to have sung at the funerals and memorials of those few who have been the closest to me in life, like my father. Singing to the dead is one of the most powerful and intense experiences of community, because sound and music has the power to fill in the absence cast by their loss, and to extend that person's living presence, through surrounding people with the sound of their life.

*Mum: Even the funeral songs, even the death songs we call it Sere ni Mate - the Songs of Death" was always a collection of voices that uplift the soul and gives pure joy to all those who are singing or taking part. We used to walk the body from the church to the burial place and from the moment we left the church we would sing and the songs that we sung were a mixture of hymns and everyone took part, from the priest in the front with the body and the children walking along to the women wailing behind, they were still singing in the middle of the wailing, I used to enjoy that! I used to enjoy the funeral! They call out Oi Lei! Wai Lei! Turanga I Jesu as they sing the Sere ni Mate. And the voices come together without trouble because the men would sing their parts and the women would sing their parts and anybody else in between would just fit in and go between the range of voices and that's how we would sing all the way from church to the burial site until we bury the dead.*

Within Fijian culture a sense of self and belonging is as inseparable from life as it is from death. Concepts of time and space are ultimately infinite and immeasurable and there is no sense of belonging or place without acknowledging this. Singing in death, as in life,

infuses life with the voices of the dead, not leaving them silent, but giving them a voice and life through those present.

## INTERLUDE

### Surfers at Caloundra

*Freed from the city and hot plains beyond  
By quiet Caloundra's surf enchanted wand  
The opium eaters of the noontide lie  
Under a cloudless seagull-travelled sky,  
A lifeless company in sun-drugged sleep  
Who have no watch or lover's tryst to keep,*

*But when, with rising wind and turning tide,  
And wavetops, flinging sea-veils like a bride,  
The strong sou-easters raise the ocean surge  
They leap like gymnasts to its rolling verge,  
And ride in triumph through the smoking foam,  
Bold sun-brown Cossacks of the sea, towards home*

*Neil Smith  
Tasmania, 1987*

## **CHAPTER FOUR: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PACIFIC PEOPLES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The embodied experiences that I have described have focused on explicating how my hybrid cultural identity has been formed in the relationships between people, the 'space' between, different members of my family, and I have tried to show how these spaces have been defined and characterized by sensory experiences, the meanings of which have been woven together into a matrix of cultural and social forces, shaping and constituting my identity.

This chapter explores the theme of how processes of Pacific cultural identity construction intersect with and reverberate through the relationships between teachers and learners in a (Western) education system (Williamson, 1992). In exploring this theme I begin the chapter by outlining Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and habitus. Then, drawing on my experiences within my home-life, I explore the constitution of effective relationships between teachers and Pacific learners. I focus on these as spaces of opportunity created for the generation and activation of cultural capital in a schooling context that are inclusive of home spaces. I organize my discussions of the educational implications of my sensory experiences and the perspectives that have been developed within them around a central motif of empathy and care.

## **A Notion of Cultural Capital**

Camille Nakhid (2003) has supported the recognition of cultural identity construction processes within formal schooling, as an essential area in which Pacific People's underachievement in education needs to be addressed. She has stated:

the theory of an identifying process involves what student's 'do' in forming their identity, that is, the way they carry out the processes of constructing and exhibiting their identity....An identifying process is....the student's own 'forming' of who they wish to be, how they wish to become, and how they want to carry out this process so that they see themselves in the organizational processes and structures of the school, and feel a sense of belonging within the school and the education system (Nakhid, 2003, p. 301)

Nakhid (2003) advocates for space within schools "and the wider education system for Pasifika students to carry out their identifying processes and for them to be able to bring, form, or connect with their own representations to be valued as all other representations and identities within educational institutions" (p. 301). From the perspectives of scent and touch, I will explore some ways in which such space can be culturally constituted between a Non-Pacific teacher and a Pacific student, within mutually constructed notions of empathy and care.

It has been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, that the educational experiences of Pacific Peoples have largely been ones in which their way of life - their culture - has deeply conflicted with that which persists in a Western education system in New Zealand. It has been proposed by other researchers (Diaz & Harvey, 2007; Mila-Schaaf, 2010) that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can go some way towards explaining

how Pacific People's knowledge, developed across different cultural contexts, can allow people to be able (or not) to adapt to and flourish within different cultural systems.

Put simply, Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is the "smarts", the street-knowledge, the cultural know-how of understanding the unwritten rules about how cultural systems, like educational institutions, work. "Cultural capital", states Bourdieu (as cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010, p. 165)" is something that is 'embodied' and '[is] convertible on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications and as social capital, made up of social obligations (connections) which is convertible in certain conditions, into economic capital". According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is created in the midst of the social and cultural contexts which shape and constitute the relations between people, that is, the social space between people, the medium through which living and learning takes place, "the context of action and interaction which seeps through into group understandings of 'how it's done' here"(Gill, 2003, p. 3). It is the knowledge and skills to both consciously and unconsciously assess one's own resources in any given situation and to know when and how to gain the upper hand accordingly, converting knowledge of the social and economic benefits to be gained in one context, across to another, learning how to define, understand and acquire those benefits when and as needed. In Bourdieu's (2004) metaphor of a game then, possessing cultural capital in an education system whose culture is different from one's own, is essentially for a person of Pacific cultural identity to know how to play the game of

education in a Western context and win, while still maintaining their cultural integrity and identity.

Susan Dubois (2002 p. 44) has stated that “acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depend on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which, in turn, is largely dependent on social class.” Lilomaiava – Doktor (2009) has provided a useful example of how *vā* or social space, is conceptualised in Samoan culture and home life, where the rules of the cultural game of life that is *fa'a-Sāmoa* are enacted and created around central concepts. *Vā*:

can only be understood within the context of a group of cultural metaphors that constitute *fa'a-Sāmoa*, or the Samoan way of life....Important dimensions include the ‘äiga (kin group), conceived of as *tino e tasi* (one body) and *toto e tasi* (one blood), and principles of *tautua* (service), *fa'alavelave* (obligations), *alofa* (love, compassion), and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) in kinship relations. (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009, p. 7)

The generation of cultural capital within *fa'a-Sāmoa* where it would bring benefits within a Western context would mean being able to frame the value of *fa'a-Sāmoa* in the terms of, and from the perspective of, both cultural contexts. These perspectives are what Bourdieu has termed *Habitus* which is stated by Dubois (2002 p. 45) to be “one's view of the world and one's place in it”. Using the example of *fa'a-Sāmoa*, one's view of the world is formed through particular practices of living and being in the world in a certain way, such as “tautua” or “*tino e tasi*”. Dubois (2002 p. 45) stated that “Habitus is an important consideration in trying to understand how students navigate their way through the educational system....It is necessary to consider both one's resources (capital) and the orientation one has toward using those resources (habitus)”.

Like Lilomaiava-Doktor's (2009) description of *vä*, my understanding of social space has been constituted within a cultural framework that involves kinship structures but which have been formed within the practices of the Fijian way: *Tovo vakaviti, tovo vakavanua* which connotes the expected way of being amongst other people – to be happy, friendly, welcoming, while also evoking cultural protocols related to one's upbringing and relationship to others through the Vanua. These practices have been shaped and moulded through the inclusion and exclusion of my family from Fijian, Kiribati and Western culture at various points in my family's history. My understanding of kinship forged in the midst of tensions between cultures, can be thought of as cultural capital depending on how effectively I use the understandings that have been given me, in another cultural context, where effectiveness depends on a combination of personal, cultural and social factors peculiar to whatever context within which I employ my knowledge.

I turn now to exploring some of the wider conditions necessary to constituting social space between teachers and students that support the generation and activation of Pacific cultural capital in a Western educational context. These conditions include the presence of empathy and care, as crucial to understanding and incorporating Pacific students' sense of habitus.

## **Towards Effective Relationships between Teachers and Learners**

Research has established that one of the most critical factors for success with Pacific students are effective relationships between teachers and learners (Hawk, Cowley, Hill, & Sutherland, 2001, 2002). Although mainly preliminary and generalized in their focus, these studies have established clear indications of the positive impact that effective relationships have on educational success with Pacific students. When these relationships are focused on cultivating shared empathetic understandings of love and care they can play a significant and powerful role in facilitating learning with culturally diverse students. Nel Noddings (as cited in McAllister & Irvine, 2000, p. 443) referred to empathy as “feeling with”, wherein one does not feel for or act on behalf of an individual; rather, one is with the individual in a nonjudgmental fashion.” Empathy does not equate to appropriating another person’s experiences or subsuming another person’s sense of reality within one’s own in the effort to empathise (McAllister & Irvine, 2000, p. 668).

Noddings distinguishes between empathy and caring. Empathy is part of a caring relationship but it is not the same as caring. However, both are relational concepts. For the purposes of this discussion, I will confine an understanding of a caring relationship to be one based on the requisites for a caring relationship set out by (Noddings, 2002, p. 19) in which (1) a person pays attention to and is motivated to respond to another person’s needs to be cared for, (2) that a person performs a caring act in accordance with that motivation and (3) that the person who is being cared for recognises the relationship as a caring one.

The capacity to create shared understandings in cross cultural relationships implies that both parties are able to construct empathetic perspectives of each other, so that each person is able to both stand inside of, and outside of, the other person's perspective. Both vantage points are necessary in order for both parties to affect the perspectives that either one has of the other, and to learn from both. Specifically, as Gretchen McAllister and Jacqueline Irvine (McAllister & Irvine, 2000, p. 443) have written, "empathetic people take on the perspective of another culture and respond to another individual from that person's perspective (Goleman, 1998; Olliner & Oliner, 1995)." This is especially important from a Pacific student's position because of the historic, systemic socio-economic inequalities that have positioned Pacific People outside and inside of the mainstream education system in New Zealand. A supportive environment at school is necessary to foster the creation of cultural capital outside of the family home. At school the knowledge necessary for success in a Western context should be provided within the bounds of a relationship which is supportive, and constituted from both cultural perspectives, to minimize the impact of cultural conflict and fragmentation of identity.

Through partnership and empathy, mutual recognition of the processes by which Pacific People's self-perceptions and their perspectives of the world are constructed, can occur. This in turn can form a hybrid cultural space within which both teacher and learner construct a role for themselves and their perspectives of each other, on the terms of the cultural particularities of their relationship. I will explore what this may mean in a

“realistic” sense, from the perspectives of scent and touch, and music and dance that I have described in the previous chapter.

## A “Scents” of Continuity

Scent and touch have created perspectives of kinship, different senses of continuity, time and understandings of rhythms within relationships, all of which structure and impact upon the creation of empathy between a teacher and learner by providing many potential openings for engagement.

The role that scent has played in my life has been to create perspectives of a kind of kinship that is accessible to me wherever I go. Scent establishes a continuity across my relationships that is place-less, as I am able to embody my memories and my immediate position with my mother, as long as I am able to smell. So my sense of continuity then, in general, is one which is not tied to any particular kind of physical space.

Kinship, and the quality of continuity brought about through scent, has influenced my sensitivity to the extent and quality of connection that I have brought to the teacher and learner relationship. In so doing, I have sought too, for the benefits that the reconstruction of kinship dynamics in the teacher student relationship, could bring me in terms of a sense of security, predictability, and a place within the wider scheme of things – inside and outside of formal learning. Maintaining some degree of continuity in the way teacher roles are constructed within cultural communities can reinforce my place

outside of school, complementing and expanding on cultural practices within my family which aid the creation of cultural knowledge, skills and the know-how that is applicable across different cultural contexts.

The importance of continuity in relationships is something that resonates strongly in the writings of Nel Noddings (1988). Noddings has described the necessity of allowing more time with students to develop the kinds of relationships that foster successful and meaningful educational experiences:

If we cared deeply about fostering growth and shaping both acceptable and caring people, we could surely find ways to extend contact between teachers and students. There is no good reason why teachers should not stay with one group of students for three years rather than one in the elementary years, and this arrangement can be adapted to high school as well. (Noddings, 1988, p. 224)

From my own experiences as being both a student and a teacher within the New Zealand education system, there is a strong emphasis put on variety, change and moving on. The movement is relentless, and where it is that one is not seen to keep up, is where one is seen to fail. This is true of the rapid exchange of deadlines from one subject to another, change of subject teachers, form teachers and form class arrangements, Deans, Assistant Deans and other middle management positions. The only continuity, it seems is with the rapid people shuffling systems of our high schools and universities. In this kind of an environment, it is exceptionally difficult for mainstream teachers to gain an understanding of the quality, nature and degree of the continuity sought by Pacific Peoples in a student teacher relationship where terms and conditions and experiences of learning can be shared, partnered in, and negotiated.

Constantly changing teaching and learning relationships negate the continuity and space to explore individuals rhythms of a person's learning and to pursue relationships which let one understand and move in time with the rhythms of another.

## **Touching the Rhythms of Life/Learning**

The role that touch has played in my life is to create a deep understanding of my own personal and cultural rhythms, which have been a core method of maintaining cultural continuity within my life. My core rhythms have been extremely difficult to change because they are so intricately tied in with a wider appreciation of a network of time and movement (rhythm).

More so anecdotally, than academically, the notion of 'Fiji time', or 'Bula time'<sup>33</sup>, is quite famous. The meaning of this teasing line which can be employed both affectionately and disparaging, depending on the context in which it is employed, refers to a much deeper phenomenon than that typically observed by Non-Fijian people. Contrary to a superficial

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<sup>33</sup>In the context of conducting qualitative research in Fiji, Glenn Laverack and Kevin Brown make the following observation:

"Fiji time means that priorities are different in different cultural contexts. The social ceremonies and customs of Fiji are of great importance and can take precedence over "just getting things done" (Leonard & Leonard, 1991). A casual pace is taken as a normal part of rural Fijian life, and plans can be changed at short notice. During the fieldwork the participants arrived around mid-morning after traveling to the community or after completing their domestic duties. The research was preceded by the ceremony of *sevusevu*, which took between 30 and 45 minutes, and this was then followed by tea and snacks. Starting the research at midday resulted in the cool of the morning's being lost, and sometimes the work had to be conducted under rushed circumstances. To strengthen the research design in a cross-cultural context, it should be flexible to accommodate an uncertain and variable time frame. (Laverack & Brown, 2003, p. 340)

interpretation, it is not laziness or some kind of inability to understand the priorities of others, but it is a completely different ordering of priorities, one which is built around the rhythms of relationships and the time required to dwell on other's rhythms, their differences and similarities, to contemplate what this means for one's own rhythms, and then to work slowly, to adjust oneself, and encourage adjustment in another, with the least amount of conflict possible. What is most important is the development and nurturing of social understanding, harmony, depth and quality of relationships, not so much the tasks to be completed, or the goals to be achieved at the expense of relationships.

The direct and unmediated connection that is the nature of touch has, in my experiences as a student, shaped the inseparability between my relationship with a teacher (my confidence and sense of where I am in that relationship), and my relationship to the ideas and concepts being presented to me. The difference in rhythms, learning pace and teaching pace has been noted as source of conflict or connection, reflected in some of the student comments quoted by Hawk et al (2001) in their study of effective relationships with Pacific students, where patience and perseverance were very important:

Some teachers make you feel stink when you say you don't know how to do it. They say 'you should have listened' or 'you wouldn't have to ask if you had been concentrating'. Then we don't ask again and we don't know what to do. Sir will go over it again slow enough for me to get it. He doesn't growl us. (Secondary student)

If we were stuck or something he wouldn't move on until we could really understand what he was talking about...and he checked our understanding. Like he'd say 'who doesn't get it?...then raise your hands. If there was say three people

he would get everyone to do exercises...and with those three he would come around and make them understand. (Tertiary students) (Hawk, et al., 2001, p. 11)

This inseparability, of relationships from learning, is not well provided for in the current mainstream education system. The imposition of external rhythms, timetabling, clock watching, bell ringing, internal and external deadline enforcing and so on, presents little opportunity for teachers and Pacific Peoples to connect their rhythms. The emphasis on externalized control reinforces the strong emphasis placed on individualised learning, and separation and distance between people is structured into every aspect of the mainstream system. From the fear of being seen to inappropriately touch a student, whether that be a pat on the arm, or a hug, to the typical architecture of mainstream schools, our system is designed to divide.

The typical architecture of mainstream schools for example, is of separate blocks, long corridors of closed classroom doors, rows of desks, and the social architecture is one of various sorting systems that schools use to siphon off people according to externally imposed perceptions of skills (or absence of). Physical and socio-spatial arrangements in mainstream university campuses in New Zealand echo the belief that knowledge and meaning that is genuine and reliable is as far removed from the humanity - the heart, soul and emotionality - of experience as possible. The lack of a physical "heart" that typify the university buildings in New Zealand encourages a hiding of vulnerability, exposure and fragility, a lack of reciprocity, a one way flow of power, of hidden agendas and parochial, protectionist, professional cultures. "I am a human being experiencing fear, laughter, sweat, and perhaps most significantly, uncertainty and ambivalence,"

autoethnographer Michael Humphreys (2005, p. 851) described. "How often...do we reveal our own emotional fragility? Wearing masks of certainty and clear direction, we [the academics] intimidate those around us, especially those new to the academic game."

These sorts of distant and emotionally cold ideals are difficult for those of Pacific cultural identity to feel any affinity with, let alone any desire for as these sorts of ideals encompass the denial of warmth and love, empathy and care. It is little surprise then that this contributes to the reticence of Pacific Peoples to enter the grounds of a Western academic world from which they feel emotionally and physically alienated.

### **Dancing/Singing: Moving with the Music**

For the last section in this chapter, I will treat dance and singing together in exploring their similarities in their relevance to the relationship between teachers and learners.

The main theme running through my experience of dance and that of music is the ability to think critically, creatively and with a high level of sensitivity to others. Within dance, this sensitivity comes from a spatial awareness, which is just as much physical as it is imaginative. My experiences of different body shape values and the aesthetics of movement between Western and Fijian culture has constituted my perspective of an individuated notion of the self, while maintaining the value of this individuality as one that is rooted within a wider appreciation of the value that it can bring to a community. Ballet created the space and conditions that nourished my sense of agency, and gave me

insight into understanding the difficulties of my family's situation where they had to challenge different cultural norms in order to succeed in life.

Music has allowed me a holistic and embodied appreciation of learning how to position myself in cross cultural, unified social relationships through a strong emphasis on harmonic singing. This is a way of being with one's whole body, moving towards a common goal or purpose that is harmonically or (in dance) choreographically constructed. Music and particularly harmonic singing is the medium through which I have learned to position myself amongst people, to open up, be vulnerable and strong, on my own, but mostly, and with greater priority, through connection with others, and to extend my presence to acoustic and spiritual spaces through this singing in connection with others, that my physical body cannot touch.

Engaging in different harmony is to engage in social structures that are simultaneously understood and expressed through the act of singing, as in, to sing in harmony is to understand in multiple ways and to express at once in multiple ways, through creation and expression with others. In dance, the spatial awareness of others involved in the dance, provides a real and imaginative network in which to engage with the constant presence of people.

The implications of music and dance for education with Pacific students lie in the asking and listening skills involved between teacher and learner which, for Pacific Peoples, are

cultivated around an awareness of people – not just one person as in a solo teacher in front of a classroom, but many other people that that one person, that teacher, is connected to.

Research that examines student perceptions of teaching styles, points out that more often than not Pacific students place sole emphasis on listening to the teacher “as the only appropriate way to learn, as it was the teacher who held the knowledge they required to pass the exams” (Perger, 2007, p. 74). Perger cites other studies which note perceived reticence in Pacific student’s speaking up in class or asking the teacher questions: “Secondary school Pasifika students...saw asking the teacher questions as disrespectful (Clark, 2001; Jones, 1991). As the teacher had already ‘taught’ them it was their fault they did not understand.” In Perger’s own study, involving Pacific students, they were asked to “identify the important classroom practices or actions that enabled them to learn mathematics successfully”. The three highest ranking classroom practices were: Listening to the teacher explain something, having time to think about the problem, and working with others to solve problems.”

Other studies support Perger’s findings. Megan Clark (2001) has highlighted cross cultural issues between Australian mainstream culture and Pacific students, which include: “reluctance to speak in class....and hesitance to approach or ask questions of teachers.” Clark observed that “these behaviours are often related to cultural factors

such as respect for authority and not speaking unless specifically questioned" but stops short of asking what these cultural factors might be.

Pacific researcher, Patisepa Tuafutu (Tuafutu, 2010) has examined the occurrence of what Perger and Clark have observed, which he terms *the culture of silence*. Tuafutu has come the closest that I found, to approaching the implications of silence for educational processes with Pacific Peoples and into providing some of the "cultural factors" that may be contributing, from a Samoan perspective. Tuafutu stated:

I have no doubt that one or two Pasifika students might ask questions, but the majority will probably be sitting at the back of the classroom in silence (for example see Jones, 1991). In certain circumstances, it is culturally inappropriate to ask, and if you want to convince a Pasifika student to ask, then you have to use the student's language....because to Pasifika peoples silence has volume; it speaks meaning (Tuafutu, 2010, p. 5).

Tuafutu further states that:

Silence is a symbolic and fundamental structure of communication. Pasifika peoples, especially elders, comprehend the whole framework that constitutes its (silences) meaning. Many Pasifika elders describe the culture of silence as a mechanism, with much spiritual, sacred and supernatural power, that can make anything possible. (Tuafutu, 2010, p. 4)

The silence that Tuafutu has written about resonates with the meaning of music and dance in the relationship between teachers and Pacific students. Music is composed as much of space as it is of sound, and harmonic singing necessitates a good knowledge of silence as the spaces and gaps between different levels of sound, a place for me to find my place. These spaces and gaps are filled with social understanding, with the mutual unspoken recognition of the places and spaces of others. Without it, there would be no harmonics and no room for anybody in the music.

The silent speech that is present in the perceived reticence that Pacific students show in class in regard to asking questions or critiquing the teacher's information can be a silent acknowledgement of the positioning and space of others to whom the teacher is connected, and to whom, as a figure of authority, the teacher herself/himself is accountable. This is similar to the silent acknowledgement of the presence of others in one's space in dance. I cannot always see who is there, but my body has learned to be aware, through the conditioning of my movements always in relation to another person's, whether it is other dancers, an audience, or both.

My perception of a teacher is not of an autonomous being, connected to an equally autonomous body of knowledge, which begins and ends with the teacher. But my heavy trust in relying on listening to the teacher stems from listening to all that the teacher is connected to, that which is spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual. It is an assumption I make, regardless of the "reality" of the situation.

Silence, reluctance, reticence and sitting in the back of the class (Clark, 2001), is not a blind obedience or a sense of shame felt about being in the class as a student of Pacific cultural identity, but it is deference to the positions and experiences of others. The respect for authority is a respect for the traditions, the structures and the systems that have positioned the teacher where they are. Authority is not something that is held only by one person, but disseminated as a relational thing, where it encourages self regulation in relationship to others in order to maintain unity and collectivity, to preserve one's

way of life. So my reluctance to question or raise viewpoints that differ from a teacher's may not be perhaps fear or a total uncritical trust in the teacher, but a recognition of the value of harmony and maintaining a state that is in accordance with those around me.

The compounding lack of teacher student time, and opportunities to establish continuity in the relationship between teacher and learner mean that it is not valuable to jump in to the classroom fray with no sense of one's own positioning, where one belongs in the music, when the opportunities for the creation of that music- the rhythm, the time, the continuity (the three preferred styles of Perger's (2007) study) which is needed to gauge one's relationship to another, is not present.

The sensory sections covered so far have focused on different aspects of the relationship between learners and teachers. Scent and touch draw on the intimacy of understanding, inherent in these sensory perceptions, that is necessary for the teacher and learner to gain a greater sense of the other's understanding of life. Scent evokes and creates a continuity within relationships, touch enables a closeness of soul, mind and being to share and co-create continuity and interpersonal connection, and singing and music make spaces and places to find oneself in relation to others.

This section has provided an overview of the educational implications of the processes of my cultural identity construction through sensory experiences. Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital and habitus have provided entry points into understanding how, within a

framework of empathy and care, the cultural identity constructions of Pacific People's can be made valuable, and given a space in the relationship between a teacher and a learner in a New Zealand context.

## **CONCLUSION: DOORWAYS TO OTHER WORLDS**

This thesis has been an autoethnographic exploration of my experiences of hybrid Pacific cultural identity construction. I have sought to understand better how the processes of Pacific identity construction can resonate with and intersect through areas of pedagogy in the New Zealand mainstream education system. As this thesis draws to a close, its limitations need to be acknowledged and accounted for, and some areas for further research, identified.

There have been many criticisms leveled against autoethnography (see Ellis, 2004). Situating autoethnography within the tradition of ethnography, Paul Atkinson (2006, p. 403) claims that the autobiographical component of autoethnography means that the researcher is elevated above all other noteworthy participants, becoming more memorable and absorbing than all other social actors, essentially subsuming them. Sara Delamont (2009, pp. 59-60) also levels a series of criticisms against autoethnography which include the points that “autoethnography is almost impossible to write and publish ethically”; “Research is supposed to be analytic not merely experiential”; “autoethnography focuses on...those easy to access” and “autoethnography focuses on social scientists who are not usually interesting or worth researching. The minutiae of the bodies, families or households of social scientists are not likely to provide analytic insights for social science.”

While not within the capacity of this thesis to address the epistemological assumptions of the accusations that are set out by Atkinson (2006) and Delamont (2009), it is sufficient to say that the main point of difference between those who support autoethnography and those who don't, revolves around the fundamental issue of different perspectives that people have of the overall purpose of research, and therefore what makes it valid and worthwhile. The claims by Atkinson and Delamont against autoethnography are founded on questions of the "rightness" and "wrongness" of methodologies as to what makes worthwhile research, a "scientific" perspective, not necessarily whether the research encourages people to live a more ethical life, by opening up and encouraging alternative perspectives to enrich people's perspectives of others. Bochner (2000) has argued:

"In the social sciences, we have never overcome our insecurities about our scientific stature....so we hide behind the terminology of the academic language games we've learned to play, gaining some advantage by knowing when and how to say "validity," "reliability," "grounded," and the like. Traditionally, we have worried much more about how we are judged as "scientists" by other scientists than about whether our work is useful, insightful, or meaningful—and to whom. We get preoccupied with rigor, but are neglectful of imagination....When we say "alternative," as in "alternative ethnography," we are implying that a domain of inquiry exists to which the work in question can be contrasted or compared. In ordinary discourse, an alternative represents an option or a substitute. But in qualitative research, alternative ethnography has evolved more as an alteration or transformation than an alternative—a change in form as well as in purpose." (Bochner, 2000, p. 267)

My experience with using autoethnography has been a liberating one, where I have had the opportunity to create a method that reflects, represents and examines my experiences, in ways that maintain the integrity of my cultural reality. This is important for educational research in a Western context, because Pacific identities are being

increasingly constructed in relation to other cultural and ethnic identities, and not necessarily in a negative or destructive way. When examining the challenges of Western pedagogy, exploring how Pacific cultural identities are constituted in relation to and together with other cultural identities can open up opportunities for research into areas such as assessment types and strategies, which bring the learner in direct and intense contact with the way in which their processes of cultural identity construction can be brought to bear on understanding how value systems are constructed in other cultures.

For Pacific Peoples, it is important, as other researchers have stated (see Anae, 2000; Penetito & Sanga, 2003), that Pacific research methodologies should best reflect the purpose for the research as it has been generated with Pacific cultural practices. There is much opportunity and potential for Pacific research methodologies to be created within the specifics of Pacific People's own experiences, reflecting the diversity of their experiences across different cultural contexts which have constituted their perspectives of what Pacific cultural identity can be.

My method, being focused only on my own experiences and that of my family's can make it difficult to extrapolate or to draw generalizations from. My method is also fairly unpredictable, and does not follow some external logic. But this is the freedom that inquiries into cultural identity construction necessitate, as it re-enacts and re-examines identity construction in real life, as it happens in episodic and spontaneous ways. The added challenge of exploring hybridity in Pacific cultural identity construction has

required even more flexibility in methodology, so that I have had the opportunity to contribute to and push some of the boundaries of what is regarded as an authentic and legitimate Pacific cultural identity. There is still a prevailing notion that cultural identity is somehow rooted in a specific time, in a specific place, and that if you have no observable recourse to this rootedness then that undermines one's claim to a legitimate cultural identity. This viewpoint is held amongst Pacific Peoples, more so in Pacific nations than here in New Zealand, but here too it is prevalent. Despite the growing population of second generation Pacific Peoples, there is a strong emphasis on maintaining homes away from home that resemble, as much as possible, a life in the Islands.

However, this has not been my experience growing up in New Zealand. I have had a sense of rootedness through my sensory experiences, but I have gained a sense of my cultural identity as something that is placeless as well. Tuan (1977, p. 6) states that space is undifferentiated and that it is transformed into a place "as we get to know it better and endow it with value", of memory, people, activity and emotion, the multidimensional characteristics of life with which, and in which, we make the world around us, mean something.

A Pacific space is a sense of presence, of being in the world that encompasses particular cultural values and beliefs that are lived out in the relationships between people, in cultural communities and groups, wherever, whenever. Spaces are more transient and

much more abstract than places, and are around for an indeterminate amount of time. I can gain a sense of Pacific space in somewhere as geographically distant as London, for example, by singing songs that connect me to my Mum's childhood in Levuka, and the songs that accompanied her walk up to the plantations. The notion of Pacific spaces interconnects with Pacific places, where places, explains Bardzell & Odom (2008, p. 40), "[are] subjective, individualistic, and [mean] different things to different people".

I hope that in travelling with me, through my explorations of the spaces and places of my life that continually evolve to make me what and who I am, that a better understanding has been reached of how processes of hybrid cultural identity construction can facilitate educational success. Some areas of future research worth exploring, are how to better prepare future teachers of Pacific learners in New Zealand, in ways that draw on the value and worth of their own personal experiences for understanding into Pacific learning processes, and for the confidence needed to take risks with learners from non-mainstream culture. Other areas worth looking at are intersections between specific pedagogical practices within particular subjects in the mainstream, and the re-framing and re-constructing of that pedagogy within cross-cultural frameworks of understanding. Another area for investigation could also be the processes by which certain mainstream pedagogical practices facilitate or hinder the creation of continuity between different subjects in mainstream schools. Whatever the area for investigation in Pacific educational research, it is worth remembering that in all learning, it is not until a learner is "at home" in the classroom that educational success is within reach.

My Pacific place is my home here in Palmerston North, New Zealand. It is the place where so much, if not all, of the foundations to my cultural identity have been nurtured and refined by my parents, drawing on their love, their memories and experiences, the spaces and places of their lives.

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## **APPENDIX: MINDMAPS**