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'Tu ga na inima ka luvu na waqa'

(The bail to get water out of the boat is in the boat yet the boat sinks)

The cultural constructs of health and wellbeing amongst Marama iTaukei in a Fijian village in Lau and in a transnational Fijian community in Whanganui, Aotearoa

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degree of

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated first of all to my four children, Christy, Koli Jnr, Gracie and Isaac. Thank you for being so patient with me-I can still hear your voices “Mummy are you finished yet? “ I can now say ‘YES’!! I hope that one day when you are all grown up you will understand what those long nights and early mornings, tears and hospitals runs were all about. Thank you for the joy you bring into my life and for being my source of inspiration whenever I want to give up-this thesis is dedicated to you!! You have my never ending love!!

I also want to dedicate this thesis to two women in my life who both passed away during the course of this thesis. First to my grandmother, Pu Pasimaca Qaravi Makiti, in retrospect you have taught me so much about health and wellbeing. As I interviewed the women, I finally began to realise what you have been trying to teach me over the years. I am thankful for your words of wisdom and the prayers you imparted into my life. To Na Levu Lupe, I had hoped you would be here to celebrate the end of this journey but you passed a year, too soon. I enjoyed our precious times in Nayau. Your words of wisdom and bubbly personality kept me going and I am thankful to God for your life. May you both rest in peace!!!

Vinaka vakalevu!!

ABSTRACT

The study identified that there are a number of criteria that have to be met in order for *Marama iTaukei* or Indigenous Fijian woman to be perceived as healthy. Findings suggest that current health frameworks need to take into account the determinants of health that are informed by cultural constructs that emerged as key findings in this study including: *Dau veiqaravi* or being of service, *Taucoko ni qaravi itavi* or completion and completeness of tasks, *Na veiwekani* or maintaining harmony in relationships and *Kena I rairai* outward reflection or physical appearance and *Bula vakayalo* or Spirituality. Exploring the intricate and delicate weaving of Fijian epistemologies and Western philosophies as illustrated through the *Tanoa Health Belief Framework* emerging from the findings in this thesis, may ideally be the future to improving health and wellbeing for, *Marama iTaukei*. The *Tanoa Health Belief Framework* has been developed to assist health and community workers to assess the determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Fijian women. This was a qualitative study with a total of 23 participants conducted in two geographical locations, one in Fiji and one in Aotearoa. The study was not a comparative study however; the study in Fiji enabled an exploration of how perceptions and experiences of health and wellbeing have evolved as Fijian women have migrated to Aotearoa. Ethnography was used as the overarching methodology as well as the *Vanua* methodology. Methods used included *talanoa*, participant observation and photovoice. In terms of methodology, a *Tali magimagi Framework* pulled together the strands of what constitutes this thesis. This includes the process of 'cultural discernment' emerging from the ethics process encountered in this research. The concept of 'culturally embedded agency' is also presented in this thesis arguing that there needs to be an agency-oriented approach to women's agenda. Culturally embedded agency calls for social policy that incorporates full participation of women in society, inclusive of indigeneity goals, cultural wellbeing and fairness. Implications of this study and recommendations are based on ensuring that health and wellbeing is achieved for the *Marama iTaukei*.

PREFACE

My interest in this research area was birthed when I was working for the Ministry of Health in Fiji in 1994 through my work in health promotion and community development in Fiji. It was during these years that I saw numerous health programmes being delivered and implemented, often with good intentions, yet these either failed or worked to a certain extent but became unsustainable after funding ceased. I began to think that perhaps we need to look at health and wellbeing from an Indigenous Fijian lens and not the western lens that had become part of our daily lives. I felt that if these health and wellbeing constructs were from the lens of the peoples they served, then we could perhaps better address the inequalities that affect their daily realities. Hence, these ideas are the origins of this thesis that is to explore the constructs of health and wellbeing from a Fijian cultural worldview amongst Indigenous Fijian women referred to in this thesis as *Marama iTaukei*.

This research has been a journey during which I have had to decolonise and change my own lenses to understand Fijian constructions of health and wellbeing. My life experiences have undoubtedly added to this thesis. I had completed most of my education in the southern states of the United States. The experience in the United States allowed me to live life as a minority in a predominantly western culture. My upbringing in Fiji allowed me to experience life as an Indigenous person within a dominant culture. The experiences in the United States and in Fiji have allowed me to live life both as part of a minority and as a member of a dominant group respectively.

It is in the United States that I encountered the civil rights movement and the struggle of a minority group of people, something I had never experienced being part of the dominant culture in Fiji. These experiences have remained a critical part of my life and have influenced my worldview in the fight for social justice for those marginalised by oppressive structures that are part of their daily realities.

Throughout my adult life, I have travelled and lived in other countries such as France, England, Japan and now Aotearoa, which have all impacted on my life and have influenced my worldview. With this exposure I feel that I have been able to reflect on things within my own culture that I would not have noticed otherwise. These various lenses have enriched my views and have allowed me to have an appreciation of my own culture and that of others. The title of the thesis "*Tu ga nai inima ka luvu na waqa*" literally translates as the bail to get the water out of the boat is within reach, but is not being used therefore the boat is sinking. This metaphor reflects the findings in this thesis that the answer has always been within the understanding of the cultural factors that influence health and wellbeing. Yet these cultural factors have never been explored and fully realised from an Indigenous perspective within the culture. Cultural factors, that metaphorically speaking, when not understood by those implementing the programmes and planning policies, makes the boat sink. This thesis explores these cultural factors through the voices of the *Marama iTaukei* in the hope that health and wellbeing can be effectively enhanced.

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GLOSSARY

B

- Bati balaou:* These are the warriors that protect the outer boundaries of the village and its chief.
- Bati leka:* Within the Vanua these are warriors that protect the inner boundaries of the village and its chief.
- Bula taucoko:* The achievement of a state of completion.
- Bure:* Traditional Fijian house.
- Butonivanua:* Chiefly clan of Narocivo.

C

- Colacola:* Burdens or tasks.

D

- Dau ni vakasala:* Provides instructions and perceived to be full of wisdom.
- Dau/gonedau:* Traditional role as fisherman or sailor.
- Daunivucu:* Composer of *meke* or traditional Fijian dance.
- Dautawaqa/mataisau:* Traditional role as canoe builders.
- Delaiwawa:* Part of the chiefly clan *Butonivanua* of *Narocivo*.

I

- iTaukei:* Indigenous Fijians as owners of the land.
- itovo vakavanua* Protocols and cultural practices and processes with the Indigenous Fijian culture.

K

- Kava:* Common name for yaqona, a ceremonial drink.
- Kida:* Lau dialect also called '*Boka*' in Bau dialect, a cultural process of paying respect for not being able to attend the funeral of a relative's death.

Korovesi: Part of the fishermen clan *Wailoli* and now non-existent in the village as there are no living males.

L

Lakalaka: Fijian dance or *meke* originally derived from Tonga and practised in the eastern part of Fiji, in which both men and women perform together standing.

Lemaki: Tribe within the village that are builders or carpenters.

M

Marama-iTaukei: Indigenous Fijian woman.

Matai: Traditional role as carpenters within the village social structure.

Matanivanua: Traditional role as an orator who speaks on behalf of a clan.

Matevakarua: Two die twice used metaphorically to mean overburdened to the point of death.

Meke: Traditional Fijian dances performed sitting or standing.

N

Na i tovo vakaviti: Fijian way of life, involving customs and traditions.

Na kila vakayalomatua: To have wisdom.

Na noqu i noke: Fishing basket (*noke*) - added prefix *na noqu* means 'it is mine'.

Nai lavelave: Methods or instructions to do something.

O

O au be'a: (*Cakaudrove* dialect) a voice of respect and humility to acknowledge the space that I am speaking from and to those I am speaking to.

Q

Qalicake: Known as farmers in the *Vuinayau* clan; the opposite of *Qalisawana* who work the land.

Qalisawana: Part of the fishermen clan *Wailoli*; the opposite of *Qalicake* who work the sea.

S

Salusalu: Garland prepared using fresh fragrant flowers.

Sau: the spiritual power believed to have the ability to curse a person who is disrespectful. *Sau* is often associated with chiefs or chiefly families, their curse for a commoner.

Sautu: Wellbeing or the good quality life of the *vanua* or people.

Sevusevu: Acknowledging entrance to the land or *Vanua*.

Solesolevaki: To work together to achieve a common purpose making mats, gardening.

T

Tabua: Polished tooth of a sperm whale, the most valuable item of Fijian property and used in exchange and ceremony.

Talanoa: Sharing of conversation and knowledge.

Tali magimagi: Used as a metaphor to talk about things in detail.

Tanoa: Bowl used to drink *yaqona*.

Tokatoka: Family units.

U

Umaumaki To eat staple food such as taro, yams and cassava with lemon, herbal or plain tea.

V

Vakamarama: A female having characteristics and qualities that bestows respect.

Vakaturaga: A male having characteristics and qualities that bestows respect; is said to be chieflike.

Vakarau vakavanua: The practices of the land or Vanua.

Vale ni bula: Hospital.

Vanua: The way of knowing, refers to 'a people, their chief, their defined territory, their waterways or fishing grounds, their environment, their spirituality, their history, their epistemology and culture¹'.

Vasu: Primarily defined as the village connection through the mother or the maternal links to a village.

Veikauwaitaki: Thinking of others.

Veidokai: Respect-to show respect.

Veisiko: To visit someone.

Veiwasei: Sharing with others.

Vuinayau: A *tokatoka* within the *Vuinayau* clan known as priests and warriors.

W

Wailailai: Part of the *Vuinayau* clan known as high priests and warriors or *bati*.

Wailoli: Clan in *Narocivo, Lau*, known as fishermen.

¹ Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p. 155.

Waisa: Part of the chiefly clan in *Norocivo, Lau*.

Y

Yaqona: Also known as *kava* or the traditional Fijian drink.

Yavirau: A traditional fishing event, usually guided.

Yavusa: Group of families populating a village.

Yalo: Spirit.

Yalomatua: Considered wise.

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