

Reframing Relationality as Cultural Work in the Global South: Moving History into the Present, and the Future.

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Abstract

The Global South was popularised during the 1970s in recognition of the greater economic and political power of the 'Third World' and as a reaction to pejorative expressions. Nevertheless, as a terminology it is formed within the colonial/modern world-system imagery and manifests multiple subaltern subjectivities and different articulations of power and resistances. In this chapter, we use the practice of talanoa as a decolonizing community arts-based methodology which is an integral part of Pacific dialogic engagement to re-narrate histories and experiences of oppression as we draw on the colonizing experiences of (hetero) gender and Whiteness shaped how these coloured our agencies. In this paper we put to work the practice and potential of talanoa as a heterodox decolonizing methodology that challenges the orthodoxies of the Global North who habitually rewards normative methodological processes. This paper located in part in the 1970s considers questions of how positionality, power and relationships are experienced and re-negotiated through the talanoa and also explores the relationship between voice and participation. Our experiences of participation articulated in this chapter take the form of narratives with an intent to interrupt, subvert and counter the orthodoxic use of analytical tools and theoretical frameworks habitually deployed and

modelled across the academy in the Global North. We consider the power the talanoa has for re-negotiating cultural differences and histories situating affective intensities to guide, dis/connect, excite, divert, inspire, distract, startle, surprise, and re-orient thinking to move history into the present, and the future.

Keywords: Decolonization, inclusion, exclusion, talanoa, transnational collaboration, reflexive narrative, cultural safety

Introduction

The Fijian philosophy of connection to culture, connection to mind and body and connection to wellbeing and spirituality in the resolution of conflict and in negotiations of access and equity is central to understanding the concept of talanoa. We focus on inclusive and person-centered pedagogical practices that connect to Indigenous knowledges through “talanoa” as a transformative learning space made up of participants who understand the importance of engaging in reflection and actively participating in meaningful collective dialogue with responsible and mutual listening. The paradox(es) of colonised identities, race and belonging in place and time inevitably confront our sense and sensibilities of (un)belonging and place(lessness). Articulating counter narratives that contest a hegemonic narrative of colonization, our voices joined together in talanoa, involved our mutual grappling with our competing subjectivities and narratives of self. In this account of our talanoa, we draw on our summoned selves as residents outside of hegemonic taxonomies of white, able-bodied, heterosexual normalcy. Situating our dissident narratives of self-making, our analytic gaze is crystalised from an understanding of how ‘[m]eanings do not exist in objects or activities; they are assigned to events by people who perceive and interpret their context’ (Smircich, 1983, p. 165). In our talanoa, our specific entanglements in and with hegemonic cultures are reconstituted. We conceptualise talanoa as a social practice that can constitute a form of knowing from which to rescript our experiences of inhabiting the borderlands as a white queer man, an indigenous Fijian Queer man and a black Caribbean woman.



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Understanding talanoa not simply as a methodology but as a way of being (together)

Irrespective of its pedagogical merits, it is important to remember that any understanding of talanoa is contingent on the economic and political conditions that shaped identities by the forces of colonialization. Colonialism is both a public and private entity that has embedded and insinuated itself into a series of innocuous, and somewhat mundane activities within everyday life that seek to invalidate Indigenous traditions as well as local political, economic, and historical understandings and practices which have over time become normalized.

By critically analysing talanoa, this essay calls attention to the need for the process of disrupting and decolonising the processes of self-produced knowledge making. In an ontological context, meaning emerges not from the thing-in-itself but from its relationships to an infinite number of things.

So what exactly is talanoa? In Fiji and some Polynesian Pacific Island countries like Tonga and Samoa, the term talanoa is used to talk about things of common concern where there may be opposing views. There are no pre-determined outcomes or expectations regarding an agreed position. A talanoa can occur in a 'circular manner' and emerge as a stream of consciousness but the discourse should be frank and the parameters grounded in inclusion, reconciliation and mutual respect. Talanoa is the 'way' of the everyday citizens. As Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014) explain:

'Talanoa is not all about 'what you say' or even just 'how one says it'...'talking straight from the heart' opens up space for greater empathic understanding – this is the emic perspective sought by all good ethnographic researchers'

This understanding of talking from the heart was practiced by the three authors of this paper. In fact for this paper, we used the concept of constructive dialogue referred to as 'Veitalanoa Yaga' (vay ta-la-noah yang-ah) for an interrogation of each other's narratives (Tiko, 2016). In our interrogating of the ways in which we navigate our 'post-colonial' identities, we consider representations of race, class, gender and sexuality and use talanoa produced narratives to manifest articulations of power and resistance as well as understandings of centre and periphery.

During a 'Veitalanoa Yaga' the most important engagement occurred in the mutual listening as well as in the responsible listening to silences - when we shared our stories and ideas while listening to each other. The process encompassed a deep, interpersonal relationship and emotional sharing among ourselves with responsibilities to work together, adhering to the spirit of connectedness. Engaging in a 'Veitalanoa Yaga', meant that we created a safe space where we embraced mutual respect throughout our dialogue. In a Fijian context, this conceptual process is referred to as **Veiogorogoci (vay rngo rngo the)**, that is, listening with the right attitude followed by right action. There is an understanding that we each need to be responsible in writing our own stories from our own context without letting others tell our stories for us.

As the knowledge systems of the Global South resist the hegemony of neoliberal, political and economic social inequality, our 'veitalanoa yaga' reaffirmed the value and valuing of human life in learning with and from others. In this paper, travelling together across lines of difference, the talanoa is an example of an expansion in understanding of a cross-cultural, relational re-centring of a methodological approach used to reframe and remake meaning. In the talanoa, the ecologies of how positionality, power, relationships and affect are experienced and re-negotiated are infused with productive relationality. As each of us became witness to the processes of how as individuals we made sense of ourselves in the world, there occurred throughout our discussions a layering of understanding (Green & Hart, 1999) which evoked the copious ways we have come to know the fabric of our lives. Ronai (1995) has proposed that a 'layered account' is that which 'decenters the authority of science by including narrative reflections, fantasies,



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and emotions along with statistics and abstract theory' (Ronai, 1995, p. 397). Our unrehearsed way of being together, in the talanoa, foregrounded an individual and collective reflexivity from which to explore and understand our experiences.

Our 'veitalanoa yaga' meant engaging our multiple interpretative positions, shaped by our personal histories to interrogate the process of our meaning-making and facilitated a shift away from colonising cultural, institutional and disciplinary knowledge producing locations.

Mark's story- Don't you ever want to be happy?

Mark uses stories to promote inclusion and social justice within teacher education. As an educator of 23 years He uses a variety of arts-based approaches to underpin his research and teaching and learning. His work has been strongly connected to working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and LGBTQ+ communitites. From the standpoint of an academic insider, he recognises in the showing of 'I' how his personal involvements and emotional attachments as a Gay/Queer man can produce a disquieting verisimilitude.

Rehearsing my entrance onto this page, I wait... and in the silence, rivulets of desire form on my body that circumnavigates bone, muscle and connective tissue. The flow of experience of living with shame and pride has brought me to a new location, a 'third space which enables other positions to emerge' (Bhabba, 1990, p.211). I have come to understand how, 'The language we speak holds our history' (Herda, 1999, p.4) and how 'Memory is volatile. Sometimes, memory's tales just won't do the work they are asked to. They just won't settle, won't arrange themselves so that they might be left alone. They are like scabs itching to be picked. They are wounds always ready to bleed again' (Pelias, 2004, p. 54). I am now caught between wanting to tell you stories but having first to find the words through which to speak. Language has become the substantive material that has bound me to the bulk of my experiences. It has formed the ways I have been revealed/hidden to the world and it is through developing techniques in this method of control that I have reiterately revolved around and spun between the inside/outside

rhetoric (Fuss, 1995). I have realised to be 'out' is really to be inside the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible. Growing up in a small northern UK coastal town in the 1980s, I quickly learned that affirmative reactions to non-normative sexualities were generally not to be expected. Announcing one's sexuality was not 'tolerated' and certainly not to be aired in public spaces. I learned how being visibly homosexual can mean becoming subject to discrimination and stigmatization. I learned from the words that fell from the mouths of my parents that sexuality is something private, taboo; not to be discussed or seen. As I entered the space of the talanoa, I was haunted by the tracescapes of the meso, micro, and nano level of how heterogendered sexuality was constructed in my childhood, adolescence and beyond. Foundational tenets to my sense of sexual dissonance. I was and to some extent still am subject to giving in to the epistemic spaces and places determined by teleological narratives of normalcy.

Many years ago, long after the dust had settled from my coming out, when my mother declared 'I haven't got a son but two daughters' and ejected me from the family house aged 16, I returned aged 24. I was at the time living and working in Japan and having decided to make the long trip back to the UK, I arrived at the family house around midnight. I don't say home for a reason as Naguib Mahfouz reminds us '*Home is not where you are born: home is where all your attempts to escape cease*'. The next morning I awoke jet-lagged and made my way to the kitchen to make coffee and light my first cigarette of the day. Just as I was about to take my first sip and inhale nicotine deep into my kippered lungs, my mother asked 'Don't you ever want to be happy?' There then followed a barrage of questionings about my life, this time the difference was that I wasn't a vulnerable 16-year old not knowing what to do or where to go. I finished my coffee and cigarette, walked to where my unpacked case had been discarded the night before, picked it up and walked out the door and disassociated myself from her forever. I changed my flight and resumed my life, returning to Asia, where my sexual differences seemed to matter less and less.



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Through my participation in talanoa, I came to think through how I am no longer able to pretend my stories are just stories, they are '...the processes, procedures, and apparatuses whereby truth and knowledge are produced and they offer hybrid spaces for enunciating 'new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words' (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003, p.4).

Peter's Story - Rejection, Acceptance, Redemption

For over 20 years, Peter Sipeli has been telling his story. His concept is simple. Stories humanise people. They show that we all face the same choices, struggles and triumphs. His hope is also simple. That through his story, people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community will be seen for who they truly are. They will be seen, and treated, like valued human beings. Today, Peter is not only a passionate storyteller and LGBTI advocate, he's also an arts manager, a spoken word supporter, poet shop owner, is managing the RoC Market in Suva and is also a Project Manager on an Arts Therapy initiative. We are proud to share his story.

Who am I? How do I see myself?

This is a bit difficult ... Let me go back ... As a person, I am many things ... I'm two years away from 50 so it means that I think I'm more aware of what I do ... who I am, remains to be explored at this moment in time.

I am a Fijian man, I identify as gay and a lot of my work is around creating voice and making space. I think this year it's been really good to think about that question - what do I do? who I am? and what do I do in this space. I am a poet of late ... My work in the last couple of years has been about reflection most specifically about my father.

About my relationship with my father... well there wasn't one ... I think there was a strained one he was one of those typical kind of men of the time... they were quiet ... they didn't really engage with the family that much, and if they did, it was an instructional-based kind of relationship. I came out to him at 17 and then it finished ...



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it stopped. I think he stopped looking at me and I became angry and never repaired the relationship and then he passed.

Upon reflection, what happened after the passing was me trying to create language about the dislocation and where I was in placing the kind of regret that I had. This was constraining ... we were in the same space, but there was no kind of relationship. It was all like empty really...

I was not there at his passing but I was told the day after.

My father was deeply Christian and kind of old Christian. I think the new Christian gives you bit more language and acceptance completely ... everything was kind of frozen in time and place ... it was supposed to be what we were supposed to do. and they were rigid. I was put out by his response because my sisters already had 'illegitimate' children so clearly there are things that the society he grew up in had decided regarding things to achieve ... for me there were two ways of behaving and this was unfolding before my eyes.

You would think that my coming out might have been less fractuous, the way it ended up being ... but they were and they couldn't come to terms with that ... it was confronting for them.

Coming out as a gay person impacted my father in a manner where it seemed to question his own masculinity, hence that break in the relationship and that break in communication. Almost certainly I think I mean now I mean well then when he passed away when you know when it was fresh I had more generosity like I wouldn't I didn't I think I was in questioning too heavy how and what we see processing 'cause I think the two things that were frozen and paramount in his brain was the church and the vanua. Anything else in-between was just not about the plan ... the plan was to be loyal to God and family and the extension of which is the land and all that entails.

I think for me, saying I was gay made him ashamed and he ended up closing himself to me ... and I felt that I had to be generous 'cause I think if I didn't, I'd still be angry. I think to be older and wiser and also to release all that pain and trauma is to see beyond that situation and just to say that he was a prisoner of his time and his circumstance in his belief system. To a degree ... because in my anger I was thinking 'you're supposed to love me **** it' and I think to a degree we were both prisoners of our own kind of ideologies. I thought about his passing for the longest time ... I was a young man and he was an old man and I could have gone in and helped to fix the situation. On reflection, one can just stand outside the wall and just wail, which in theory I was doing.

Our mom was alive when I came out and she was amazing like from the get go. Culturally, she was always someone who was more in tune with the Samoan concept of fa'afafine¹. As such, she was more accepting, just as a woman you know. She was also friendly with Johnny, who was a flamboyantly gay guy who used to live next door to our family home. Johnny had 'crazy' hair and he would come over to our home to cut my mom's hair. The subliminal message was *'we accept you and what you doing here with us ... but don't talk to us about your real life ... too much information.'* When I told her I was gay, she immediately said, *'Don't tell your father'*. The processing of my mother's passing was difficult because I think that every day after her passing, he became nastier.

My poetry was an outlet – it was used to reframe/reinterpret my relationship with my father and I used poetry as a vehicle to process those experiences. I mean I've always written I think only when I started hanging out with people like Luisa Tora² who then started taking me to the Oceania Centre at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in

¹ The Samoan term fa'afafine refers to men who are raised and identify as females. It means 'in the way of a woman'. The fa'afafine community identifies differently from the lesbian and gay communities. Fa'afafine is considered a third gender.

² Luisa one of the protagonists that started the first gay lobby and was a great friend and confidant of Peter's. She now resides in New Zealand.

the early to mid 90s then started going to those readings you know with Teresia Teaiwa³. I thought maybe that's what I've been writing... poetry... back then, the writing was a little bit of show. At that moment in the 90s, I came out, I was living alone and living in Suva. It became the way to articulate who I have in that space and the first collection of my work called 'The Blue Boy Dreaming' published by University of South Pacific Press, was about growing up gay in Suva. Engaging with my trauma and my grief around my father changed my writing style and this happened when I was older, in my 40s. By that time I had read all the books I had known: philosophers like Epeli (Hau'ofa) ⁴ and scholars like Konai Helu Thaman⁵. I was definitely influenced by the movement of late 1960s to early 1970s where the first wave of contemporary Pacific writers like Albert Wendt, Konai Helu Thaman, and Epeli Hau'ofa thrived. That was the renaissance of the Pacific. The fact that I was also changed as a person, meant that my language had also changed. My outlook had changed; so writing about my father, though it was cathartic, really helped me heal. This anthology for my father was really sharpening my thinking and writing skills as a poet. I think it was really a turning point of my writing.

The anthology is situated in a three part series **Maps of the Ancestors** was written after he passed away whilst I was in Tahiti and published in English and French in Tahiti by La Petit Press in 2017. I liked the idea of an anthology and also 'longform' poetry as exemplified under:

My tongue, na yamequ, a library of stories within stories, of my life and all the lives of my ancestors inside of me sit thick, like molasses on my tongue.

³ Teresia was a distinguished award winning scholar, poet, activist and mentor who grew up in Fiji. She was well-regarded for her ground-breaking work in Pacific Studies. Her father was I-Kiribati and her mother African-American.

⁴ Epeli Hau'ofa was a Tongan and Fijian writer and anthropologist. He lived in Fiji and taught at the University of the South Pacific. He was the founder of the Oceania Centre for Arts at the USP and his work continues to be highly revered.

⁵ Konai Helu Thanm is of Tongan and Fijian writer. She was the first woman Professor in the Pacific and a renowned Pacific Island Poet.

My belly, na ketequ, where my sacred self is sleeping, where borrowed dreams and my inherited 'mana'⁶ transmit memories and power through my skin

My head, na uluqu, I pick up radio frequencies of my other selves, I hear voices of my people in languages that I cannot understand, like waves they roll in and out of my body, my body, this vessel, this canoe

In early 2020 '**Sleeping Ancestors**' was published and this was followed by '**The Ascendant**' which '*On reflection, was a carthartic experience that stretched me and allowed me to grow in ways that I had not previously thought possible.*'

I had come out at 17 in 1992; we had just gone past the AIDS crisis it was the time for living one's truth. AIDS impacted almost everyone's life ... and so coming out of the closet conversation was a political movement saying 'we are here'. We need to be reckoned with as citizenry of Fiji and services like medical care needed to be made available to us. The coming out process was our response and as a young person, I was always looking outwardly and wanted to be part of the people 'over there, in that global world' ... I wanted to tell my truth.

Ketequ

(2)

Na Ketequ⁷, my belly where my ancestors sleep dreaming in black and white picture postcard frames their sleep interrupted by the noise of my broken heart

I carry 'our' worlds in our belly,

I carry my father in my belly

his silent anger sits hard at my pito⁸

Reminding me of his journeys, his pain and his absent love

I carry my grandmother 'e' Samoan woman of noble birth who raced away in a lonely boat from her family, to marry a commoner in Fiji who talked to the spirits and believed in Jesus her laughter and love stay with me

⁶ Mana means 'the spiritual life force energy' that permeates the universe.

⁷ Fijian word for 'my belly'

⁸ Samoan word for 'belly button'

I am halves of many parts, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Scotland These
parts of me sit in war and peace in my Center
They speak to each other in metaphors understood only by the gods
I feel them when I walk through the plantations of my father
I hear sometimes in my words
And sometimes they come to me in dreams and they weep at my bed asking me to
forgive my father, to speak only what is in my heart and to only fear untruths and to
plant my ego in the forest so worms can feed on it and I can be free again

Ann Cheryl's Story: Tensions of a Border-Crosser

Ann Cheryl's story spans two oceans, four continents (including the Blue Pacific Continent) and thirty-three years. For as long as she can remember, she has always been committed to ideas of social justice, diversity, and creating opportunities in developing world spaces. She is a black (mixed race) Trinidadian person of Grenadian parents. For most of her academic journey, her work has been underpinned by Freirean philosophy because notions such as 'the culture of silence', 'banking education', fighting for cultural justice and developing 'new' more liberatory forms of pedagogy and so on spoke to the post-colonial experiences of people, like herself, from the Caribbean.

How do I identify? I usually refer to myself as a Caribbean person (Trinidadian to be precise) and I see myself as a 'border-crosser', moving between spaces. I use the term 'border-crosser' because the essence of me remains distinctly Caribbean even though I have lived in the UK, Australia and Fiji and have travelled widely as a researcher-educator. In this border-crossing reflection, I witnessed a move from special education and the way it is used in a developing country context, to it being used to label racial minority groups in the UK and Indigenous groups in Aboriginal People in Australia.

My story begins in the 1970s in Trinidad which set the tone for my early experience of Special Education. In Trinidad the expression was not interpreted in terms of race and yet in the UK I saw how race was systematically incorporated into educational systems

and used to isolate and discriminate against children and young people like me who had their heritage in the Caribbean. I was initially shocked by how this contrasted with my own experience in Trinidad where the emerging attention to 'special educational needs' was at that time driven largely by educators who were advocating for the enhancement of professional skills and resources to provide fair opportunities for all children.

I was just 12 years old in secondary school when I saw the marching and heard the chanting through the streets. They marched up the hill to our school chanting "Power to the People". It was the period of the Black Power Revolution where on February 26, 1970, hundreds of Trinidadians:

... mostly trade unionists and students, took to the streets across the country, and slogans of 'Power to the People' reverberated through the crowds. Fists were outstretched in a gesture which had become the worldwide symbol of a radical phenomenon sweeping the globe: 'Black Power!' was the protestors' cry. ... This reaction would catalyse one of the most prominent displays of Black Power in Caribbean history: the Black Power Revolution...[whose] seeds were sown by a longstanding dissatisfaction with the limits of independence in a neocolonial world (Blakson, 2023).

That was a symbol of 'breaking away' from the legacy of the metropol. Calypsoes⁹ emerged with the lyrics:

*Black is beautiful
Ah say to sing it aloud
Black is beautiful
Say I'm black and proud
It's high time that we get rid of that old slave mentality.*

⁹ A calypso is a type of folk song primarily from Trinidad though sung elsewhere in the southern and eastern Caribbean islands. In this case the subject was political, and the tone is the development of social pride.



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Everyone developed a new sense of national pride and post this period, people with black and brown skin were eligible to become teachers, bank workers, and members of the public service. Whiteness was NOT a criterion of automatic acceptance.

In this context special education was seen by teachers as more concerned with empowerment than with control, but in the UK, authors like Bernard Coard (1971), a Grenadian 'dared' to write about "*How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain.*" In these different contexts and in their different ways the 70s was a period when race and difference were re-made and re-storied through both discourses of empowerment and discourses of 'subnormality'.

The 1970s was a cathartic period in Britain as it was in many spaces in the Western World. Although I arrived in England well after that 1970s period when special education was reconstructed by racism, it still carried that baggage, evidenced by the over-representation of black, 'gypsy' traveller, LGBTQ and other demonised groups in special education.

In the 1990s race relations continued to be an on-going discourse in the UK and there was little advancement in the discourse around inclusion and race except through authors like Sally Tomlinson (2014) who helped us to reflect on the ways in which discrimination worked within the education system including the policies and the issues that enable its facilitation. A definite eye-opener was looking at how powerful discourses around deviance, special education and subnormality were used as control mechanisms to justify the marginalisation and oppression of children who were targeted because they were black, or part of the traveller community, or were gay, and so on. This resulted in an over-representation of black children and other minorities in special education and sociologists like Sally Tomlinson showed how special education operated as a system to manage what are seen as a deviant population and how it created and managed difference, poverty, otherness. These different perspectives and experiences

demonstrated how a person's history and cultural background are important because they help to position that person in the world.

For myself, as an immigrant to the UK, fitting in was not without its challenges. I understood many of the social codes having been educated and raised in a former British colony. But prior to that, I had never lived in a country where I was 'in the minority'. When I lived in the UK, I was still struggling with the notion of inclusion. I could not understand why people were excluded in the first place. As a black person in a white country I was, for the first time, directly confronted with racism and exclusion. As a Trinidadian, a black person from a black country, I struggled with this experience and found it difficult to understand how some people thought that I was not like everyone else. This experience helped me to understand the importance of context, but also the importance of seeing and making connection across different experiences of exclusion. I recognised how inclusion and inclusive education were important parts of a discourse surrounding disability rights and how this discourse was related to others in the educational and broader social spheres: race, gender, social class and so on. Inclusion was concerned with the commonality of struggle across different experiences of exclusion.

Later emigrating to Australia in the early 2000s, I looked at my career and reflected further on how I saw the world. In Australia, I saw the same over-representation of certain groups in special education, social care and prison, but this time the over-representation was of Indigenous children. Here again was a developed country with 'developed systems', segregating people based on race.

It was also striking how a euro-centric curriculum is deemed to be objective and neutral in ways that disacknowledged the identity and well-being of others. As de Plevitz (2007: 60) argues:

A number of educational policies are based on the assumption that Indigenous people who no longer live in the 'traditional way' have 'lost their culture' and are therefore 'like us'. This is not so. Whether they live in remote areas of Australia

or in the city, Indigenous people maintain a culture, not based on physical characteristics but on common beliefs, family ties, language and shared history.

Disturbingly, it has been found that 'Aboriginal people are more likely to die in custody as well as being arrested and jailed at disproportionate rates' (Evershed et al., [2020](#), np). They are more likely to be stopped, interrogated, charged, arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned, rather than receive bail or community service orders. There is a disproportionate application of the law where the punishment does not match the 'crime' (Australian Law Reform Commission, [2017](#)).

Inclusion is a tricky concept. I was still confused but I do believe in meaningful dialogue and respect for other people's positions in life and their opinions. I have moved from understanding inclusion purely as a special needs construct to understanding it in the broader sense of diversity involving all people of the world regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, differing abilities, native language, native country of origin, and so on.

The Pacific was an entirely different experience. As a Caribbean educator, some of my knowledge was located within my social history and my teaching community but I felt that being 'black', or brown skinned as they would say in the Pacific, and speaking the language of de-colonization, would allow me a measure of acceptability. I felt that having explored the histories of some of the marginalized groups from the Caribbean and elsewhere that I was able to empathise with others who lived in small island developing states like those in the Pacific. I was sadly mistaken. In spite of the fact that I saw many similarities between our various cultures, I was still viewed as an 'outsider' in some spaces. I was not 'Pasifiki' and am sometimes looked upon as an 'odddity'. In Fiji, I'm back in a developing country context and systems of inclusion and exclusion work differently here. There are 17 special schools and students are accepted based on Special needs. However, exclusion occurs when the system is supposed to be moving to disability-inclusion and the infrastructure is not quite there to allow a seamless transition, nor are the teachers equipped with the necessary skills and strategies to allow

that to occur, and many classrooms continue to be overcrowded ... typical developing world issues.

In spite of the highs and the lows of my life's journey, I have come to understand that for inclusion to be meaningful it must not be mere lip-service. All must mean ALL and to do so it has to challenge the discriminatory behaviours of those in positions of power.

Those positions of insider/outsider, inclusion/exclusion provided specific vantage points from which to see and interpret the world. This awareness has been used as a tool of social liberation because it has been used to identify what is noteworthy, what needs to be changed or modified and the processes which could help or hinder such change.

Admittedly, living in different spaces became a series of rather intense social experiences which were both inclusionary and exclusionary. With that same breath, I also think that it is precisely because of my varied experience in the Caribbean as an educator, researcher and a student of life, that the border-crossing process was for me, filled with serious hope, earth-shattering fears, nail-biting frustrations and some built-in assumptions which could either work for me, by enhancing the quality of my perceptions, or against me by providing me with a false and over-inflated status of 'expert'. These border-crossing opportunities have allowed me the space to re-discover and re-evaluate my *raison d'être*. I have endeavoured, as advised by Mills (1970:245/6), to "[b]e a good craftsman ...[and] to seek to develop and use the sociological imagination" remembering all the while that "(s)cholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career" (Mills, 1970: 216).

Despite the challenges, I continued on this journey of self discovery and de-colonisation.

My story is validated by the words of an African proverb that expresses the challenge of controlling a narrative, "Until the lion learns to speak, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter". In his book *Education of a British Protected Child*, Achebe (2009: 79)



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explains that 'Colonization has given us a world, a literary tradition, that has left us with a particular way of looking (or, rather, not looking) at developing countries'.

Not a conclusion – the story never ends

Cunliffe (2001) has suggested that truth and knowledge can be critically reconstructed as a dialectical social practice and throughout our time spent in the talanoa the stories that emerged could best be described as a blending of fact and fiction, memory and amnesia, the referential and the textual, the historical and the rhetorical. As a practice of mutual endeavour a talanoa can productively tell stories of complexity, diversity and texture and they do so by situating, at the heart of social inquiry, authentic engagement with the individual, the inter-subjective and the socio-cultural. A textured way of knowing, according to Schrag is a means of integrating 'communication and praxis, purposive behaviour, social practices and institutional involvement within a common space' (1986: 133).

Our unrehearsed way of being together facilitated the production of knowledge away from procedures guaranteeing uniformity, standardization and normalization into perspectival dispositions that erased boundaries. between cultural, institutional and disciplinary locations. Resisting hegemonic modes of knowing meant engaging our queer positionalities and our multiple interpretative positions that had been shaped by our personal histories to interrogate the process of our meaning-making.

Our talanoa might be considered by some as mere 'idle talk' that could be thought of as an unscrutinized interpretations or mere gossip but gossip has been acknowledged as important in establishing and maintaining social relations and norms within a group (Blum-Kulka 2000). Turner (1994), has identified gossip as one of the most common means for transmitting information that is often excluded from more official channels of communication constructed as an inauthentic discourse that merely repeats what is heard without critically examining the grounds or validity of the subject matter in question. It is worth noting that 'practices systematically form the objects of which they speak'

(Foucault, 1972, p.149) and in relation to the Global South the talanoa in articulating descriptions of the life as lived, the life as experienced and the life as narrated illuminate 'the constitutive moments and modes of identity' (Bell, 1999). The talanoa as a form of cultural practice relies on a speech activity that in process defines social relationships. Gumperz (1982) considers a speech activity as being concerned with '...a set of social relationships enacted about a set of schema in relation to some communicative goal' and proposes that speech activities '...imply certain expectancies about thematic progression, turn taking, rules, a form and outcome of the interaction as well as constraints on context (Gumperz, 1982, p. 166). Talanoa acts as a type of dialogic interaction that can facilitate significant self-disclosure and self-discovery. It is as a cultural practice of producing knowledge instrumental for scaffolding reciprocity into social identities. The significance of the type of talk being traded in our interactions meant we continued to travel in togetherness (St. Pierre, 1997) and drew on multiple and overlapping histories to tell of how our performances of non-normative identities got textualised in our everyday lives.

Inclusion and inclusive practices have become the popular international buzzword. There is hardly a document that is entertained without the concept of inclusion interwoven within its folds. Unfortunately people are socialised within traditions and cultures and in many instances, these broader social systems are themselves disabling of, or discriminatory towards people by putting them into categories outside what is perceived to be the mainstream. A candid review of the current world situation that is riddled with inequalities, suggests that notions of inclusion must be broadened to address not only the needs of those who have been placed within different classifications but also those who are disenfranchised as a result of poverty, ethnic or gender discrimination, sexual orientation, disabilities, war displacement or for various other reasons. These are 'othering' labels used for exclusionary purposes. People should always have the opportunity to learn from each other and about each other. It is this lack of opportunity that is disabling because their potential as humans is being limited when we propose and support systems that are inequitable. In summary, we posit that in the Global South identity is something that *gets done* within specific discourses and social practices. The talanoa is a practice that can afford and offer a 'care for the self' (Foucault, 1987, p. 117-



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118), honor a chosen manner of being in the world, and permit a way of acting visible within intricate relations with others. Our understanding of talanoa is one of situating lives as sites of identity formation, self-definition, and affiliation (King, 1999). The talanoa potentially offer opportunities to question how the autobiographical frame' can become a structure through which alterity and silence are enacted and constituted in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes the onto-epistemological foundations of making silenced voices heard.

We recognize that colonization either through race or through class divisions has left a scar on the psyches of people who have been colonized. We have used voice through the talanoa to move beyond colonized control to the **POLITICS OF POSSIBILITY**. Achebe reminds us that in the middle ground, 'the human spirit resists an abridgement of its humanity... And this was to be found primarily in the camp of the colonized, but now and again in the ranks of the colonizer too' (Achebe, 2009, p. 23). As a research praxis it can be implemented by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to focus on contradictory, realities and lived experiences to explore and challenge dualistic notions of knowing and being known and to craft frameworks that allow research to break free from rigid structures; to venture into uncharted territory where stories merge and diverge, weaving new threads of meaning and significance.



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