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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Understanding Pacific worldviews: principles and connections for research

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we identify the commonly shared principles that underpin Pacific worldviews. A focused literature review was conducted, concentrated on research by Pacific scholars and experts. The context for the review was to inform and guide a multidisciplinary team, led by the University of Otago, on the nexus between public housing and urban regeneration, and wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand. With Pacific peoples accounting for 26 percent of public housing tenancies in 2022 Kāinga Ora et al. [2023]. Fale mo Aiga Pacific Housing Strategy 2030. file:///C:/Users/thoma81p/Downloads/4208-Fale-mo-Aiga_Placemat-6_0.pdf, we considered it imperative that Pacific perspectives be integrated into the methodological approach of the research programme. Five recurring principles were identified from 86 texts, published between 1990 and 2023 in peer reviewed journals and grey literature. They included holistic systems; the collective family; spirituality; Pacific peoples' connection with the natural world, denoted as guardianship and stewardship; and the theory of space and time and relational relationships, embodied in the Samoan and Tongan concept of Te Vā. These principles sit alongside the Whakawhanaungatanga Māori Wellbeing Model and other frameworks (Te Ao Māori, Māturanga Māori, and Māori Sustainability) developed by the Māori Strand. Notwithstanding the primary purpose of this research, the intention of this article is to share our findings more broadly.

Some Pacific Words: *Aiga*, *kāinga*, *vuva*, *whāmere* (family); *fale* (Samoan house); *lau-kafa* (Tokelauan word for sennit); *paopao* (Tokelauan word for outrigger canoe); *pou* (Samoan word for posts holding up a building); *tapa/ngatu* (Tongan and pan-Pacific word for bark cloth); *te feke* (Tuvaluan word for octopus); *te kora* (Kiribati word for making string from soft dried coconut fibres called *binoka*); *talanoa* (talk or discussion, telling of stories); *tivaevae* (Cook Island weaving of quilts); *ula* (Samoan word

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This article is one in a series of three-related studies on public housing and urban regeneration and wellbeing. The first is An Inclusive Wellbeing Framework (Arthur Grimes et al. 2023). The second is A Whakawhanaungatanga Wellbeing Māori for Research and Development of Housing and Urban Environments (Guy Penny et al. forthcoming).

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crafting of garlands and necklaces); *Vā, La-Vā, Te Vā, Tauhi Va, Teu le va* (theory of space and time and relational relationships).

Introduction

This article examines some of the core common principles that influence how Pacific people view the world. The context for the research was to inform and guide a five-year research programme on Public Housing and Urban Regeneration (PH&UR), led by the University of Otago. The aim of this article is to share our findings more broadly. The article comprises four main sections. The first section examines the increasing diversity of the Pacific population of Aotearoa New Zealand and what is meant by the term ‘Pacific’. The second section sets out the methodological approach to the literature review, including the use of search terms and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The third section discusses the findings of the literature review to reveal five shared principles that determine how Pacific people commonly perceive ‘wellbeing’. This section examines a wide number of Pacific models starting with the highly influential *Fonofale* (Pulotu-Endemann 2007); *Te Vaka Atafaga* (Kupa 2009); *Fonua* (Tu’itahi 2009); and *Vanua* (Tuwere 2002) to more recent literature on Pacific epistemology (Kana’iaupuni and Malone 2016; Koya-Vaka’uta 2017), and Pacific research methodologies (Anae 2019; Naepi 2019a, 2015; Goodyear-Smith and Ofanoa 2022; Ministry of Pacific Peoples 2022, 2020). The fourth section discusses our findings, focusing on the how the principles connect to form holistic systems, and the role of Indigenous worldviews.

Background

Pacific peoples make up an estimated 8.7 percent of the total population of Aotearoa New Zealand and this is projected to increase to over 10 percent by 2034 (StatsNZ 2021). Although the ethnic composition of the Pacific population continues to largely reflect historical migration (influenced by colonial and constitutional relationships and the demand for labour in the post-World War II period), nowadays, an increasing number of distinct Pacific groups are identified as living in Aotearoa New Zealand (StatsNZ 2018). The 2018 Census identified 17 distinct ethnic groups comprising the Pacific classification category. These include: Cook Islands Māori, Fijian, Hawaiian, I-Kiribati, Indigenous Australian, Nauruan, Niuean, Ni Vanuatu, Papua New Guinean, Pitcairn Islander, Rotuman, Samoan, Solomon Islander, Tahitian, Tokelauan, Tongan, and Tuvaluan (StatsNZ 2018). The eight largest Pacific populations are: Samoan (47.9%), Tongan (21.6%), Cook Islands Māori (21.1%), Niuean (8.1%), Fijian (5.2%), Tokelauan (2.3%), Tuvaluan (1.2%), and I-Kiribati (0.8%). Adding to this complexity is the number of Pacific peoples who identify with more than one ethnic group. This was indicated in the 2018 Census, as 25.6% of the Pacific population identifying with two ethnic groups. A further 11.8% identified with three ethnic groups, and 2.4% with four ethnic groups (StatsNZ 2018).

Commensurate with this increasing ethnic diversity is the growth in the range of Pacific languages and cultural profiles that contribute to Aotearoa New Zealand’s identity as a Pacific nation. This diversity can also be seen in the nearly 40% of the Pacific

population who identify with more than one ethnic group. In 2018, 25.6% of the Pacific population identified with two ethnic groups; 11.8% with three ethnic groups; and 2.4% with four ethnic groups. This rich diversity can be seen in the proportion of Pacific population in Aotearoa New Zealand that speak more than one language. In 2018, 37.8% of the Pacific population were indicated as speaking two languages, and 2.5% three languages (StatsNZ 2018).

Demographically, the Pacific population is young, with 33.6% of the total population aged under 15 years, compared to 19.6% for the total Aotearoa New Zealand population (StatsNZ 2018). Another important aspect of the Pacific population is their place of birth. While it may be commonplace to associate the Pacific population with migration, the reality is quite different nowadays. In 2018, 66.4% of the Pacific population was born in Aotearoa New Zealand, with 33.6% born overseas (StatsNZ 2018). Another aspect of this is the age profile of Pacific people born here compared to those born overseas. As a young population, 46.4% of the Pacific population born in Aotearoa New Zealand was under the age of 15 years, compared with 9.0% born overseas. This suggests that over the longer term, the growth of the Pacific population in Aotearoa New Zealand will be most greatly influenced by the Pacific population born in Aotearoa New Zealand, rather than through migration.

In terms of the original context for this research, statistical data on the housing experiences of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, reinforced the importance of Pacific worldviews be incorporated into the PH&UR research programme. In 2018:

- The homelessness prevalence rate for Pacific peoples was 578 people per 10,000 compared with 217 people per 10,000 people for the total population.
- 21 percent of Pacific households own their home, compared to 60 percent of New Zealand Europeans.
- More than 64 percent of Pacific households rent their home, compared to 32 percent of New Zealand households.
- 24 percent of households experiencing severe housing deprivation identify as Pacific peoples, six times the rate of New Zealand Europeans.
- 40 percent of Pacific peoples were identified as experiencing high levels of overcrowding.
- Around half of Pacific peoples lived in an owner-occupied dwelling in 1986, but by 2018 this had fallen to just over one-third.
- On average, Pacific peoples rated the affordability of their homes lower than the total population and were more likely to say their house or flat was very unaffordable.
- Over half of Pacific peoples lived in homes with at least one housing problem (for example, cold, mould, dampness) compared with 32 percent of the total population.
- 39 percent of Pacific peoples living in private homes are in crowded conditions, compared with 11% of New Zealanders.
- Although comprising 8.7 percent of the population of Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific peoples made up 26 percent of public housing tenancies in 2022 (Kāinga Ora et al. 2023; StatsNZ 2023).

So, what does the term ‘Pacific’ refer to in terms of the Pacific population of Aotearoa New Zealand? Thomsen et al. (2018) note that it is much more than a descriptor of those

who migrated. They suggest that it represents the way that Pacific people view the world, their way of life, and their behaviour within the world realm. This leads to a second question: how should we refer to those who identify as Pacific? For the purposes of this article, we have chosen to use the term 'Pacific peoples' rather than 'Pasifika'. While we recognise the symbolism of cultural commonality inherent in the development and use of the term 'Pasifika', our preference is to acknowledge cultural distinctiveness and then draw in common aspects, rather than the other way round. In doing so, term 'Pacific peoples' also seeks to offer respect to the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific region. This approach is in line with the extensive literature showing the unique epistemologies of Indigenous Pacific peoples that have determined cosmological belief systems, ancient mythology, and unique cultural practices that continue to define Pacific peoples to this day.

Notwithstanding cultural distinctiveness, this study reveals shared principles that commonly underpin Pacific worldviews. These shared principles are not intended to convey 'sameness', but rather shared interpretations within Pacific cultural diversity. This article also acknowledges the development of pan-Pacific models that have sought to communicate to wider audiences certain aspects of how Pacific people view the world. The Ministry of Pacific Peoples is an agency that stands out in this regard. In its role as the leading government department responsible for Pacific peoples, the Ministry has worked hard to disseminate information on the principles and values underpinning Pacific worldviews and best practice processes for meaningful engagement with Pacific communities (Ministry of Pacific Peoples 2022, 2020). We recognise the importance of the dissemination of information about Pacific peoples to mainstream agencies and broader Aotearoa New Zealand. At the same time, we sound a word of caution regarding the risks that can arise from over-simplification.

Mainstream researchers are at significant risk from gleaning a narrow interpretation of complex Pacific constructs in the absence of cultural context. An example of this is the use of the term spirituality as a key aspect of Pacific worldviews. At its most basic, 'spirituality' could be interpreted as referring to Pacific peoples' high rate of affiliation with Christianity and the role of churches. Our research indicates that 'spirituality' is much more than that. It is about deep spiritual connections with the natural world going back to ancient times, relational relationships, connections with ancestors and more, that go to the heart of cultural identity. We argue that these principles must be understood by all seeking to conduct Pacific-related research and those responsible for policy formation and service delivery to Pacific communities.

At the other end of the spectrum, the review of Pacific literature suggests that some of the deeper, more complex philosophical discourse, which provide key insights into Pacific worldviews, is unlikely to be understood outside the purview of Pacific scholars and experts. While this research does not solve this problem, it is hoped that this review furthers our understanding of some of the core principles, which underpin Pacific worldviews.

Methodology

A targeted literature review was conducted to elicit the commonly shared principles that underpin Pacific peoples' understanding of the world. The aim of the review was to answer the question: *What are some of the commonly shared principles that shape*

Pacific worldviews? Our starting point for the review was to examine three highly recognised and respected Pacific models to assist in framing our search terms. They comprised: *Fonofale*, a Pacific health model developed in 1984 by Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann when teaching nursing and health studies at Manawatu Polytechnic (Pulotu-Endemann 2007); *Te Vaka Atafaga*, developed by Kupa (2009), a model setting out core concepts for the health and wellbeing of Tokelau people; and *Fonua*, a Tongan model of health and wellbeing developed by Sione Tu’itahi (2009).

Guided by these models, an *a priori* list of key concepts was identified to inform our search terms. They comprised: Pacific principles, *holism*, *family*, *spirituality*, *environment*, and *Te Vā*, *the theory of time and space*. Further search terms were added to complete the list of search terms. They included: *Pacific epistemology*, *mythology*, *ancient spirituality*, *the definitions of ‘Pacific’ and ‘Pasifika’*, and *Pacific research methods*. These search terms were used to search for articles published in peer-reviewed journals and grey literature. The decision to include grey literature sources reflected our desire to access a wide range of evidence sources, particularly from Pacific experts and organisations whose work may not be found in academic journals. Publications since 1990 were the focus of the targeted literature review. With a revised *Fonofale* published in 2007 (Pulotu-Endemann 2007), this important Pacific model was able to be included, alongside other more recent publications.

Our approach was to be as inclusive as possible within the parameters of the inclusion and exclusion criteria developed for this review (see Table 1). No other limits were imposed on geographical location and type of Pacific model and principles. The only caveat was the need for articles to be written or translated into English. Although we recognised this as a limitation, unanimity on the principles, suggested this to constraint to be manageable. Consistent with most literature reviews, quality assessments were not undertaken (Levac et al. 2010). Overall, this method resulted in a rich collection of literature on Pacific worldviews and the principles that underpin them. Although this project did not require ethics approval, it was covered by a broader ethics application that was approved by the University of Otago Ethics Committee relating to research on Public Housing and Urban Regeneration (PH&UR), led by the University of Otago.

Searches of six electronic databases were conducted, comprising: The Muse, Social Science Research Network (SSRN), JSTOR, OneSearch Manoa, Google Scholar, and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples. Two search rounds were undertaken. The first round yielded 1785 publications, with a further 46 added to the list as a result of reference citations. After the removal of duplications, a total of 1796 was left for title screening and reading of abstracts. This process resulted in the exclusion of 1592 articles based on a lack of focus on theoretical narratives on Pacific worldviews. From this, 204 full texts

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Articles in English published in peer-reviewed journals 1990–2022Articles of any type, including grey literature written in EnglishFocus on theoretical Pacific models including culturally specific and pan-PacificArticles on Pacific research methodologyArticles on the definition of Pacific and Pasifika	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Articles in languages other than English or full text not availableArticles not focused primarily on Pacific worldview models or theoriesClinical reports on Pacific health and wellbeingPacific wellbeing outcomes relating to ‘economic wellbeing’ only

were read to assess their eligibility, resulting in the identification of 65 articles for inclusion in this review.

Qualitative analysis of the data identified five commonly shared principles underpinning Pacific worldviews: a holistic view of the world, the collective family, spirituality, connectedness to place, land and ecosystems, and Te Vā, the theory of space and time. Notwithstanding the clarity of these findings, we were mindful of the dominance of Polynesian perspectives that formed a significant component of our evidence base. A second round search of literature focused on Melanesian and Micronesian worldviews was conducted, eliciting a further 21 articles, which were included in this review.

Although, this second round search revealed significant epistemological and social diversity across and within these geographical regions, analysis of these further articles reinforced our findings of the five commonly shared principles. Although predicated on different mythology and cultural traditional practices, Melanesian and Micronesian worldviews were also based on principles of holism, the collective family based on kinship, spirituality, connection to the natural world and relational relationships over space and time.

As a result of these searches, 86 articles were included in this review. They comprised 48 journal articles and 38 sources of grey literature. Of these, 43 articles focused directly on specific and pan-Pacific frameworks. The remaining 43 centred on specific aspects of Pacific worldviews, such as, spirituality, Indigenous traditions, and the sacred connection of Pacific people to place, land and environmental ecosystems.

An examination of the literature included in this targeted review showed a clear increasing trend in the number of articles published on Pacific worldviews since 1990. The number of articles increased from three (1990–2000); 24 (2001–2010); 45 (2011–2020); and 10 (2021–mid 2023). Three factors have been identified as contributing to this upward trend. The first was an increase in the number of culturally specific frameworks. The second was an increase in research on aspects of Pacific worldviews, such as the role of Indigenous knowledge and the preservation of environmental ecosystems (e.g. Dickie 2005; Nunn et al. 2016; Bryant-Tokatau 2018; Rarai et al. 2022). The third was the application of Pacific worldviews in shaping Pacific research methodologies (e.g. Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba 2014; Naepi 2019a, 2015; Cammock et al. 2021). A consistent theme to also emerge from the review was the importance of ‘decolonising’ approaches to Pacific research, through the recognition and application of Indigenous knowledge (e.g. Mahina 2010; Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea 2014; Tunufa’i 2016; Koya-Vaka’uta 2017; Tuia and Cobb 2021).

Thematic findings

As noted previously, we identified five principles that formed the foundation of Pacific worldviews. Drawing from the literature, this section briefly discusses each of these principles.

(1) Holism/holistic systems

The principle of holism or holistic systems emerged as a fundamental tenet of Pacific worldviews. Irrespective of cultural differences, including narratives and illustrative

imagery used to convey holistic systems, there was universal congruence of the integrated way that Pacific peoples view the world. Whether depicted in the form of a ‘fale’ in *Fono-fale* (Pulotu-Endemann 2007), an outrigger canoe in the Tokelauan model of health *Te Vaka Atafaga* (Kupa 2009), or garland in the Tongan framework, *Kakala* (Thaman 1992; Fua 2014), all the Pacific models comprising this literature review spoke of the intricate relationships and connections, over time and space, between people, the natural world, non-living, and living things.

All Pacific models, in their own way, speak of the intricate connections between all things, living and non-living, over time and space that make up the ‘whole’. For example, in the Fijian framework, *Vanua*, Tuwere (2002) refers to the universal whole in terms of the interconnectedness of people to their land, environment, cultures, relationships, spirit world, beliefs, knowledge systems, values and God/s. Similarly, *Fono-fale* (Pulotu-Endemann 2007) depicts interconnected parts of the ‘fale’, including the floor, the pou, and the roof. Each part has an important role in ensuring the resilience of the ‘fale’. As with other models, any part becoming weakened or lacking harmony with other parts is deemed to put at risk the wellbeing of the ‘whole’.

This imagery of intricate connectedness of whole systems is also evident in the Tokelauan model of wellbeing, *Te Vaka Atafaga* (Kupa 2009). In this model, the holistic system is illustrated in the form of a traditional *paopao* (canoe). As with *Fonofale*, where all parts are connected (Pulotu-Endemann 2007), all parts of the *paopao* are depicted as part of an integrated whole. Every part needs to be connected and work in harmony to ensure the ability of the *paopao* to successfully navigate its way through open seas, a metaphor of Tokelauan people’s lives. In this model, *te tine o re tagata* (the physical body), *mafaufau* (mind), *kaiga* (family), *tapuakiga* (spiritual beliefs), *pupuiiga o te tino o te tagata* (environment), and *fakalapopotoga* (support systems) comprise the *paopao*. Put another way, no part on its own can ensure wellbeing.

A vital aspect of Pacific holistic systems is relationships, which extend to animate and inanimate objects. This includes connections between people and their environment (natural and built), ecosystem services within the natural world, spiritual links with God/s and the wider cosmos, and links with those who have left the living world. One of the most illustrative ways used to depict the intricate importance of relationships can be seen in the art forms of different cultures. One of the most used of these art forms is the depiction of woven mats, as interconnected strands that come together to form ‘one’. Some examples include: the Samoan model *Fa’afaletui*, based on ways of *fa’a* (weaving together), *tui* (deliberations of different groups) or *fale* (houses) (Tamasese et al. 2005); and the visual depictions of woven pandanus mats made of concentric circles representing relationships.

Other art forms also used to convey the essence of relationships include: *Manulua* depicting the Tongan kupesi, a design drawn on ngatu (tapa) (Vaioleti 2006); the Cook Islands research model *Tivaevae*, which uses the metaphor of a handmade quilt to denote the importance of relationships for achieving beneficial outcomes (Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges 2019); the Samoan *Ula* model (Sauni 2011) that refers to the weaving of garlands as an act of hospitality; and *Te Kora*, the Kiribati practice of making string from two soft dried coconut fibres called binoka (Schütz 2022). Another model, which also depicts the essence of holistic systems, in a dynamic and adaptable manner, is the Tuvaluan model *Ola Lei* (Panapa et al. 2021) which is based on the

concept of *te feke* (octopus) that intertwines social, cultural, economic, and spiritual life with land and the ocean.

We recognise that there are many other art forms that depict intricate relationships, including mythology, storytelling, song and dance, and drawings. Each in their own way seeks to illustrate the integrated worldviews of Pacific peoples in their own unique, but commonly shared way. At the heart of all of them is the importance of meaningful relationships based on values of respect, reciprocity, and trust, among others to enable these connections to endure over time. An important point here, is that relationships do not simply just exist. Rather, they need to be nurtured and protected for the benefit of the holistic system. This includes ongoing relationships with ancestors and sacred sites that exist in spiritual form to guide future generations. Finally, we end this section drawing from research by Anae (2019) that attends to the integrated worldview that is Pacific holism:

Pacific peoples view the self as comprised of their social relationships, their land and physical resources, and the spiritual. This view of the self and the relationship between the self and others features the person not as separate from the social and environmental context, but as more connected and less differentiated from them. The emphasis is on attending to them, fitting in, and harmonious interdependence with them. (Anae 2019, pp. 7–8)

(2) Aiga, kāiga, vuvale, whāmere, family

‘Family’ is described as lying at the centre of Pacific worldviews. For Pacific peoples, the notion of ‘collective family’, bound by kinship ties, goes beyond simply the concept of the nuclear family. It is within this construct that eminent scholars, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi (2008) and Maualaivao Albert Wendt (1996) note there is no ‘self’ in an individual sense. Rather, Wendt (1996) argues, the ‘self’ is ultimately relational or communal, rather than individualistic. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi (2008) explains this further by reminding us of the role of the collective family in this often-quoted text:

We are not individuals because we share a tofi (inheritance) with our families, our villages, and our nations. We belong to our families and our families belong to us. We belong to our villages and our villages belong to us. We belong to our nation and our nation belongs to us. This is the essence of our sense of Pacific belonging. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi (2008)

Explaining further what is meant by relational in the context of the ‘collective family’, we are reminded that it is more than simply about the ‘present’. It is about ancestral ties that bind the ‘collective family’ over time and space. The key point here is that not even death separates these ties. It is the ‘collective family’ that is the repository of these ongoing relationships. It is the role of elders who are respected and revered to ensure that cultural wisdom, traditional values, knowledge, and memories are passed down through the generations to form a link between the past and the present.

Another important aspect of relational aspects of the ‘collective family’ relates to the cultural values that underpin the intricate relationships of Pacific families. Bound by values of love, respect, nurturing, and reciprocity, the Pacific family encapsulates cultural rules and relational spaces that determine how members of the collective behave within a

cultural setting. This includes faka'apa'apa (respect) and sacred relationships between family members (Fepulea'i and Hiringa 2016; Rankine et al. 2017, p. 12), the caring of sick family members, and respect for elders. It also includes cultural tenets about the roles of family members, including those of children. The point we are seeking to make here, is that in the context of Pacific worldviews, the Pacific 'family' is a cultural construct based on the collective social organisation, deeply embedded cultural principles, and relational relationships.

It is the totality of these cultural aspects that can be seen in the positioning of 'family' at the centre of Pacific models. In *Fonofale*, this is portrayed as constituting the foundation of the *fale*, that is, the foundation of health and wellbeing (Pulotu-Endemann 2007). In *Te Vaka Atafaga*, family is represented as the intertwined threads of the *lau-kafa* (sennit) used to lash the joints of the paopao (Kupa 2009). Just as the *lau-kafa* is tightly woven in *Te Vaka Atafaga*, the notions of weaving and the binding of strands, depicted in *Tivaevae* (Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges 2019), and *Te Kora* (Schütz 2022) are symbolic of the tightly knit bonds that distinguish the Pacific family.

The collective notion of 'family' is how Pacific peoples perceive 'wellbeing'. In the absence of individualism, this discourse suggests that Pacific people's perceptions of 'success', 'happiness', and 'satisfaction', all attributes of wellbeing, lie with the collective family. Put another way, Pacific peoples' perception of 'failure', lack of achievement, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction, pertain to the collective. We consider that it is imperative that researchers recognise these intricate ties that bind Pacific families when undertaking research on important issues, such as 'wellbeing'.

(3) Spirituality

Spirituality is depicted as being the essence of Pacific people's existence. It is variously described in terms of shaping how Pacific peoples live their lives, express themselves, and view the world (Tuware 2002; Ihara and Vakalahi 2011; Tuitoga 2020; Pasifika Proud 2022). As with all Indigenous peoples, spirituality for Pacific peoples is not new. It goes back to the earliest of times when Pacific peoples sought to make sense of the world around them. It is these spiritual connections that are acknowledged by many scholars as forming the foundation of Pacific worldviews, including cultural traditions, sacred sites, and the links between Pacific peoples and the natural world (Dickie 2005; Nunn et al. 2016). This brief discussion seeks to uncover how these ancient beliefs and, more recently, Christianity and the role of the Church influence these worldviews.

Spirituality has its origins in the varied mythologies that have guided Pacific peoples over the aeons. Each in their unique way, depict the existence of higher powers for the creation of all things. These include the creation of celestial bodies, the sky, the land, and the spirit world. It is from this combination, argues Dickie (2005) that all life is said to have emerged, creating its own nature that fits ... *perfectly in balance with the larger whole* (Dickie 2005, p. 4). So why is ancient spirituality so important in how Pacific people interpret the world and why is spirituality so important for wellbeing?

To answer this question, we are reminded throughout the literature, of the spiritual connections Pacific peoples have with land and the natural environment (Nabobo-Baba 2008; Nunn et al. 2016). It is these deep ancestral ties that link people

to those who had connections to the land and who have departed to the spirit world. It is this intimate and unbreakable links with the land that is reflected in how Pacific peoples view themselves as ‘belonging’ to the land, not the land belonging to them. Dickie (2005) describes this spiritual connection as the source of life, noting the role of these links within the natural world:

Because all of life is interwoven, the land and its living creature can be viewed as symbols. Spirits permeate matter and animate it; and the rich symbolic association brings the sacred into everyday life. Each landscape dwelling, such as a forest, cave, mountain, or island is like a chapel for a higher life. Ancestors and spirits may remain or take form in these natural formations, as well as the sun, clouds, moon, or sea. (Dickie 2005, p. 9)

We recognise that this intricacy may be difficult to understand. To assist with this, and drawing from the literature, we highlight the spiritual connections that Pacific peoples have with the natural world. Since ancient days, spirits were imbued in all things, from celestial bodies, highest mountains, forests, rivers, and lakes, flora, and fauna, down to the mangroves, coastal landscapes and out to sea. According to Nunn et al. (2016), it is these spiritual ties underpinning sacredness and taboo, respect for land and the natural environment, planting and harvesting, and cultural traditions that form part of Pacific people’s cultural identities. This is particularly evident in the representation of spirituality in the arts. This includes the recalling of ancient narratives and storytelling, song and dance, drawings, carvings, weaving and traditional Pacific tattoos depicting ancestral links. Early spiritual practices that can still be found today, but never spoken about, include closely guarded ceremonies kept within families, the use of ancient chants to call upon spirits, and the use of spells and potions often referred to as black magic for positive and negative purposes.

Christianity emerged as another layer of spirituality for Pacific peoples (Wildermuth 2012). The review identified two main ways that Christianity was dealt with in terms of spirituality. The first was in the form of silence. Here, Pacific models, such as *Fonofale* (Pulotu-Endemann 2007) and *Te Vaka Atafaga* (Kupa 2009), referred to spirituality with no specific reference to Christianity. This should not be interpreted as an absence of Christianity, but rather that Christianity was part of the spirituality and mythology continuum. The second involved the integration of Christianity within spirituality. In this case, Christianity either appeared at the outset of any discussion on spirituality, or as an addition, in reference to its historical place for Pacific peoples.

Irrespective of its presentation, spirituality, in all its forms is considered as underpinning life. The review suggests little or no demarcation between spirituality in its ancient form and Christianity. Tuitoga (2020) suggests that the lack of demarcation between the two reflects the fact that spirituality is a ‘life force’, spanning traditional-oriented belief systems, devotion to history, ancestral links, and other beliefs, such as Christianity. What is irrefutable is the importance of spirituality in all its forms for Pacific peoples. It is this significance that explains the essence of spirituality in Pacific wellbeing. As a core factor determining how Pacific peoples view their lives, spirituality transpires as one of the most powerful determining factors of Pacific worldviews, and, therefore, wellbeing. From a Pacific worldview, spirituality is central, and wellbeing does not exist in the absence of balance of spirit, body, mind, and the environment.

(4) Connection to the Natural World

Pacific peoples have always had an intimate relationship with the natural environment Koya-Vaka'uta (2017). Whether living on large volcanic Islands or the smallest of atolls, each Indigenous group learnt to carve a living that required them to understand and protect their unique ecosystems. This close relationship was necessary for their survival and for the survival of future generations. It is from respect for the natural world, imbued also with spiritual powers that Pacific people developed their own knowledge systems about how to manage their resources. Across the Pacific region, Pacific peoples have acquired Indigenous knowledge on all aspects of the natural world, including how to manage and tend to land, the contribution of ecosystem services of forests, water bodies, mangroves, and flora and fauna (Hughes 2006).

It is these intense physical and spiritual relationships that underpin the approach that Pacific peoples have with their natural environment. Kana'iaupuni and Malone (2016) argue that in the case of Indigenous Pacific peoples, it is about harnessing and working with nature's energy rather than seeking to control and profit from it. They articulate how the incorporation of nature into the sacred becomes not only a view of life, but a way of life. This essence is conveyed further:

The native peoples of the Pacific Islands find their love and respect of land imbedded into all aspects of their lives, finding history, beauty, and sustainability on every level. This perception has allowed them to live for generations in peace and health with the sacred land that surrounds them. (Kana'iaupuni and Malone 2016, p. 7)

This ideal is not to suggest that all have worked well in protecting the natural environments. Indeed, colonisation and the movement into the Pacific region of large companies seeking to extract resources for colonial powers was the entry point for much of the pillage of natural resources and destruction of once pristine ecosystems. Supported in later years by poor political governance in the name of economic development, Pacific peoples have unfairly suffered from the negative impacts of external forces.

These experiences serve as a caution of the impact of unsustainable practices devoid of Indigenous participation in decision making. Only now, with greater awareness of climate change and the rise of sustainability on the global agenda, is there a greater focus on the role of Indigenous wisdom for environmental wellbeing. It is clear that Pacific peoples never lost their knowledge or sought to disconnect with the natural world. Rather, Pacific worldviews typify those intricate relationships as part of sustaining cultural identity (McCarter et al. 2018).

Research suggests that not even in the face of climate change is the resolve of Pacific peoples to strengthen the resilience of their natural systems lost (Bryant-Tokalau 2018; Teariki et al. 2019). Ancient history shows why, despite its challenges, Pacific people's unbroken connection to the natural environment sees them not as victims, but as warriors who can draw on their inner strength and knowledge to stay in harmony with their local environs. Bryant-Tokalau (2018) points to the ability of Pacific peoples to adapt to changing circumstances. Drawing from their history, Bryant-Tokalau (2018) notes:

... Pacific Islanders have been adapting to and mitigating against environmental change for much longer than is currently understood. Travel over vast distances to reach their homelands, regular movements back and forth between islands, dealing with disasters, sudden

environmental change and also incremental change over decades, all beyond the control of small communities, do eventually lead to adaptation. (Bryant-Tokalau 2018, p. 2)

Pacific people's connection to their natural environment emerges from the literature as a core principle of how they view the world and their perception of wellbeing (Spencer et al. 2020). It is from this principle that notions of environmental guardianship, stewardship, sustainability, and protection emerge in how Pacific peoples care for their natural world. What is perhaps less well known is how Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand draw on those connections here. The research suggests that in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, access to the natural environment is vital for the wellbeing of Pacific peoples. Talking to I-Kiribati living in Aotearoa New Zealand we are reminded that: it is the smell of the ocean, the sound of waves, and the rustling of trees on a full moon that evoke these connections with nature here, and back in the Islands (Thompson 2016).

(5) Vā, Te Vā, Teu le va, Tā-Vā, Tauhi Va

A vital, yet somewhat complex principle emerging from the literature is the theory of space and time, variously referred to as Vā/ Te Vā/Teu le va/ Tā-Vā/ Tauhi Va. A Pacific construct, based on Samoan and Tongan epistemology (also found in Māori epistemology, referred to as Te Wā), Te Vā refers to the theory of space and time between people or things (see for example, Ka'ili 2005; Vaioleti 2006; Anae 2007, 2016; Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009; Mahina 2010). To assist our understanding of this concept, and its significance for Pacific peoples, Mauaiaivao Albert Wendt (1996) seeks to describe what it is not. Wendt (1996) notes that in contrast to notions of 'space', which are typically associated with concepts of vacantness and separation, Te Vā does not refer to empty space or space that needs to be filled. In contrast, Wendt (1996) argues, it symbolises woven connections of space and time that hold things together.

Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change ... A well-known Samoan expression is 'Ia teu le va': Cherish/nurse/care for the va, the relationships.' This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, more than individualism: who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships. (Wendt 1996, p. 402)

The notion of space 'connecting', rather than 'separating', is central for those seeking to understand how Pacific peoples view the world. As defined by Wendt (1996) and Mahina (2010) the concept suggests that everything is in boundless relationships. Tongan historian and anthropologist (Dr Hufanga 'Okusitino Mahina 2010) clarifies this further by referring to the *space between*, the physical spatial dimension and relational space within a cultural setting. Mahina (2010) uses the example of relational space as the ongoing relationships in genealogy:

From a ta-va theoretical view, genealogy merges with the fact that all things, in nature, mind, and society, enter into eternal relations of exchange where conflict and order are mediated through symmetry. As a human phenomenon, genealogy is about people who cross paths in physical, emotional, and social ways, culturally ordered and historically altered through intersection and separation. (Mahina 2010, p. 188)

In the context of family, Ka'ili (2005) describes Te Vā as the socio-spatial ties created by family who are genealogically woven together. According to Ka'ili (2005), the weaving of these connections is represented in Tongan mats where the identities of Tongan people are determined by their genealogical ties to their fonua (land and its people) and to their kāinga (family) (Ka'ili 2005, p. 91). The expression of socio-spatial relationships can also be seen in the way Pacific peoples express their positioning when they identify themselves. A common practice when Pacific peoples meet is to identify themselves in relation to their parents, grandparents, and other kinship links, including their location, such as island and village. In Kiribati, with 33 islands straddling the equator, this positioning typically starts with the sharing of location, subsequently moving on to reveal kinship ties. In the Tongan cultural context, Ka'ili (2005) explains:

... tracing of hohoko (genealogy) is a cultural practice of positioning oneself within one's genealogy in order to organize a vā (sociospatial tie) with another Tongan. (Ka'ili 2005, p. 91)

Te Vā, or sacred relationships can also be seen in the relationship between Pacific peoples and the natural world. (Wildermuth 2012) notes that this can be seen in the interplay of linguistic form between the human body and the environment, where human life is viewed as being equivalent and complementary to cosmic, plant, and animal life. Within this context, the natural environment is not considered as having to 'serve' humans, suggesting some form of superiority of man, but rather, the conceptualisation that 'creation' was part of them. This is explained:

Their relationship with the natural world was based on va tapuia, a sacred relationship between humans and all things. (Wildermuth 2012, p. 9)

Intrinsic to Te Vā are the notions of 'symmetry' and 'balance' for the sustaining of harmonious sacred relationships (Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009; Tu'itahi 2009; Mahina 2010). This includes relational relationship between animate and inanimate objects, described by Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi (2008) in terms of:

... harmony with the cosmos; harmony with the environment; harmony with one's fellow men; and harmony with one's self. (Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi 2008, p. 1)

The significance of symmetry and balance is also recognised as a vital component of Pacific peoples' wellbeing (Tamasese et al. 2005; Ihara and Vakalahi 2011). In their work on Pacific mental wellbeing, Tamasese et al. (2005) describe the relational self and mental wellness as a ... *a state of relational harmony, where personal elements of spiritual, mental and physical are in balance* (Tamasese et al. 2005, p. 300). This is further reiterated by Mila-Schaaf and Hudson (2009), referring for the need for 'melino' (peace and harmony), guided by ... *principles of balance, reciprocity and respect* ... for wellbeing (Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009, p. 116). Mahina (2010) goes on to explain that ... *conflict and order are mediated through symmetry* (Mahina 2010, p. 188). It is symmetry that is associated with 'balance in life' or 'positive balance', which is considered vital for health and wellbeing. In addition to symmetry, several studies emphasise the value Pacific peoples 'negotiating space' to improve their wellbeing (Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009; Mila 2016). This includes support for Pacific peoples having access to Vā-centred

services, based on processes which build rapport and sustainable relationships (Te Pou 2021).

Symmetry and balance also emerged as an important theme in relation to Pacific research methodology. For example, 'Ofanoa et al. (2015) and Otunuku (2011) argue that only by respecting cultural principles, such as Te Vā, can all voices be heard. This is supported by Cammock et al. (2021); Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014); and Naepi (2019a, 2019b, 2015) who highlight the importance of Pacific-led engagement, such as talanoa, strengthening the voices of Pacific peoples. Anae (2016) advises that this requires identifying Te Vā in terms of 'spaces' between different stakeholders and learning to value, 'look after', and nurture the physical, spiritual, cultural, social, psychological and tapu 'spaces' of human relationships. Providing advice to those seeking to connect with Pacific communities, the Ministry of Pacific Peoples (2022) recommends the 'creation of meaningful spaces' to enable purposeful and truthful engagement to occur. Overall, advice on the incorporation of Pacific-led research methods is argued as being vital, for what some authors call, the decolonialisation of research methods (Tunufa'i 2016; Tuia and Cobb 2021).

Discussion

The purpose of this targeted literature review was to identify the commonly shared principles that underpin Pacific worldviews. Five core tenets were identified from the review of 86 articles, including 20 Pacific frameworks. They comprised: holistic systems, the collective family, spirituality, connection of Pacific peoples to the natural world (denoted as guardianship and stewardship), and the relational relationships embodied in the Samoan and Tongan concept of Te Vā. As noted earlier, each of these principles was identified as being integral to Pacific peoples' interpretation of the world around them. Adding to our knowledge of the principles, in this section we go further to discuss how shape Pacific perspectives.

Our starting point for this discussion is the integrated worldviews of Pacific peoples. While each of the principles was identified as playing a key role in the formation of Pacific worldviews, none was found as doing so on their own. One of our key findings was their fluidity, evidenced by their many points of intersection and interaction. Our results indicated a multitude of intricate and over-layering connections between the principles. They include: those between people (kin, family, tribe, and community); people and the natural world (land, mountains, rivers, and flora and fauna); and people and God, ancient gods, and the spirit world.

Aided by our understanding of relational relationships, embodied in the notion of Te Vā, we learned that these, and all other connections, exist over spatial and temporal dimensions, connecting Pacific peoples from ages past to the present, and into the future (Wendt 1996; Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi. 2008; Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009; Tu'itahi 2009; Mahina 2010). We likened these connections to a 'scaffold', holding the principles as a networked 'web', where everyone and everything is bound in an endless state of interconnectedness and interdependency. Through this process, we also learned that not all things are physical and visible (e.g. spirituality and cultural knowledge), and that weak ties and a lack of symmetry can lead to systemic imbalances, resulting in reduced wellness of the 'whole'. For Pacific peoples, this included

poorer physical and mental health, and lower life satisfaction (Tamasese et al. 2005; Ihara and Vakalahi 2011). With the cruciality of relationships established, these results served as an important reminder not to take relationships for granted, but as advocated by Wendt (1996) and Mahina (2010), to 'cherish' and 'nurture' them, including having recourse to mediating cultural systems to manage conflict or lack of peace, which may arise. Based on these findings, we concluded that holistic systems were based on the notions of collectiveness and unity, as opposed to separateness and singularity.

Having established the collective nature of Pacific worldviews, we sought to understand what influenced the framing of Pacific holistic systems. We identified that, just as none of the principles stood on their own, similarly, holistic systems did not exist in a void. One of our key findings was that the relationships between the principles were not random or accidental, but purposeful and ordered. Examining the arrangements of Pacific holistic systems, represented in the Pacific models and wider literature, we uncovered two central characteristics common to the holistic way that Pacific peoples understand the world and Indigenous worldviews. These two features explain the order with which connections shape Pacific worldviews.

The first was the integrated way of interpreting the world. Consistent with Indigenous worldviews, Pacific viewpoints were identified as being based on all things, animate and inanimate, being connected (Ka'ili 2005; Vaioleti 2006; Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009; Mahina 2010; Anae 2016; Tynan 2021). The second was the notion of relational relationships, core to both Pacific and Indigenous worldviews, where all things are perceived as existing in a state of relatedness (Wendt 1996; Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi 2008; Wildcat and Voth 2023). We found these two key tenets as influencing the arrangements of relationships between the principles. This was evidenced in how these connections were framed relative to ancient mythology, cultural knowledge, and traditional customs, going back to the beginning of time (Dickie 2005; Kana'iaupuni and Malone 2016; Nunn et al. 2016; Koya-Vaka'uta 2017; Tuitoga 2020). We concluded that Pacific worldviews have their origins in the Indigenous worldviews of the Pacific of the Pacific.

Reflecting on these findings, we wondered the extent to which the principles were relevant for the increasing proportion of the Pacific population born in Aotearoa New Zealand. An example of potential discord between Pacific worldviews and real life experiences, cited by Thomsen et al. (2018) was the decline rate of church attendance, particularly by Pacific youth, in Aotearoa New Zealand. They suggested that Pacific youth may be having their spiritual needs met in different ways than through traditional means. Seeking to understand this further, our own examination of census data StatsNZ (2018) identified a notable downward trend in religious affiliation and church attendance by the Pacific population in Aotearoa New Zealand. This led us to question the extent to which Pacific peoples born here have the same depth of connections with the natural world as depicted in the literature. We determined that this review could not answer the extent to which the principles identified in this review were relevant for those born here.

What we are certain of is the high level of unanimity within the literature on the commonly shared principles, which underpin Pacific worldviews. We contend that any differences do not negate our findings. Reinforcing this was the great proportion of authors who were identified as Pacific, many of whom worked in university institutions, and policy and service organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. To bridge this knowledge

gap, we recommend future investment in research to ascertain the extent to which Pacific peoples born in Aotearoa New Zealand align, or not, with our findings. This should include exploring factors, which may account for any variances, including the impact of adaptation away from the Islands, living arrangements, and cultural and linguistic loss.

Drawing on our findings, we conclude this discussion by providing some advice to those considering conducting Pacific research. First, and foremost, these review findings are not intended to replace relationships with Pacific communities. The aim is for these findings to serve as a knowledge base to enable researchers to secure meaningful relationships, so that they understand what is being shared by those who so kindly give of their time. Second, we urge researchers to be respectful in how they use the principles, by understanding their essence, interconnections, and placing them in a cultural setting. While we recognise that Pacific worldviews are complex, and that there may be a need for researchers to focus on specific sets of connections, it is imperative that you always come back to the 'whole'. To us, this means using the five principles in a way that unifies our understanding of integrated worldviews, rather than fragments them. To do otherwise, would in our view, perpetuate the colonisation of Indigenous perspectives.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. The first, is that as a focussed literature review, this research does not constitute a comprehensive study of Pacific worldviews. With much of the literature written by Pacific scholars and experts based in Aotearoa New Zealand, we recognise that the review may not have captured a full account of worldviews by experts in the Islands. With the literature review heavily based on specific and pan-Pacific models epistemology, the second limitation is a lack of information of the worldviews of Pacific peoples born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Finally, we acknowledge that our identification of the five commonly shared principles may have missed other core tenets. Although this may be the case, we are confident that the five principles discussed in this article unpin Pacific worldviews.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to identify the commonly shared principles that underpin Pacific worldviews. Five recurring principles were identified from a focused literature review of 86 texts, published between 1990 and 2023, in peer reviewed journals and grey literature. They comprised the indivisibility of the 'whole', that is, holistic systems, the collective family, spirituality, the relationship of Pacific peoples to the natural world, denoted as guardianship and stewardship, and the theory of space and time and notion of relational relationships embodied in the concept of Te Vā. While each of these principles were found to play a vital role in the formation of Pacific worldviews, none did so on their own. All were identified as being interconnected and interdependent, in a purposeful and ordered manner to form 'whole' systems that underpinned Pacific worldviews.

In essence, Pacific worldviews are holistic. Guided from the beginning of time, Pacific peoples' understanding of the world, is a manifestation of the Indigenous

worldviews of the people of the Pacific. All things are connected (animate and inanimate) over space and time, and for these links to endure they must be respected, cherished, and nurtured. Binding these relationships are ancestral links between people and place, cultural practices, and values. These include the recalling of ancient mythology, legends, stories passed from one generation to the next. That being said, relationships are inherently not static. They are dynamic and have the ability to change and transform, consistent with Pacific peoples' adaptation to new environments and experiences. This may indeed be the case for the increasing proportion of the Pacific population born in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly Pacific youth, who whatever reasons, view the world differently from those with close connections back to the Islands. We consider this to be an area worthy of future research. At the same time, the unanimity of views across the texts indicates a high degree of congruity that the five principles and the relationships, which sustain them, underpin Pacific worldviews. We conclude that understanding the nature of these relationships is key to understanding Pacific worldviews.

Finally, we would like to thank all the authors who shared their research and views. For those new to Pacific worldviews or about to conduct Pacific-centred research, we advise you to read widely and reflect. Use any knowledge gained wisely and with the utmost respect. Also, appreciate complexity and not be tempted to pull things apart for convenience. Always come back to the 'whole' and listen to those who so kindly share their wisdom. That is the spirit of *Talanoa*.

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