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Part 1

Recognition of Place and Context in Using Pacific Research Methods and Methodologies

TEI TE AKAU ROA: AN OCEAN OF METAPHOR IN PACIFIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

EMMA NGAKURAVARU POWELL
Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtākou | University of Otago

ABSTRACT: Pacific methodologies have often drawn inspiration from metaphorical interpretations of our natural environment. Pacific theoreticians and researchers have attempted to use key cultural practices and iconography, ancient ritual and ceremony, oceanic topographies and the significance of island geomorphology and ecosystems (including the role of the human) to critically map research approaches and designs and carefully draw correlations between Pacific lives and the creation of Pacific worlds. These methodological innovations are powerful because these conceptualisations of key aspects of the Pacific world speak so clearly to lived Pacific experience. In this article, I explore the significance of metaphor in Pacific research with a focus on oceanic topography in the Cook Islands context with discussion of the reef. This discussion is inspired by Elizabeth Wright-Koteka's use of the reef in the critical framing of her thesis, "Te U'u nō te Akau Roa: Migration and the Cook Islands" (2006). With consideration of this text, and a brief survey of creative and critical texts in Pacific scholarship, I encourage reflection on the construction and use of the metaphor in Pacific research practice and describe how useful this can be with reference to te akau roa—the long reef—as both a metaphor and powerful topographical feature in the social imaginary and life of Cook Islands peoples. I conclude with a brief discussion of where I see the reef (and conceptualisations like it) situated in the growing body of writing and research about Pacific methodologies.

Keywords: Cook Islands, Pacific methodologies, Indigenous methodologies

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Metaphors are among the most powerful intellectual tools that we have in the Indigenous Pacific academy. Used well, metaphors allow many of us to convey the deepest cultural beliefs of Pacific peoples without belabouring the vocabularies of western knowledge systems that often fail to represent our world-views accurately enough to be useful to us. This use of figurative language to translate aspects of the Pacific world to outsiders, or indeed into western ontological and epistemological frameworks, is a tricky enterprise. For example, in her article "On Analogies: Rethinking the Pacific in a Global Context" (2006), the late Pacific studies scholar Teresia Teaiwa discussed the at-times problematic use of the analogy in Pacific scholarship, warning about the ways figurative language could as much enlighten as obscure the realities of real Pacific lives. Nevertheless, the use of metaphors across academic

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and privately commissioned research continues to increase, from the use of woven and sewn materials to show the intertwined nature of theory and practice to the ways that ocean-going vessels might be used to metaphorically represent the journey of those managing research projects or organisations along continuums of development and change.[1] Metaphors have been incredibly useful to Pacific research, but they have, in my estimation, been unevenly described and applied in that same work.

In this article, I bring the reader's deliberate attention to the presence of the metaphor in Pacific research methodologies with the intention of gesturing to their power and our responsibility as researchers when wielding them. In particular, I wish to transcend the idea that metaphors are only figurative devices within dialogue and text. Rather, they are *lived* realities for Pacific peoples. I focus here on the popularity of metaphors inspired by the ocean and its topography within Pacific research work, and in particular, I discuss the power of the reef within the Cook Islands context, where much of my recent research work has been centred. A physical location present in the daily lives of those who live in, and belong to, the 'enua (islands, lands and waters) that make up the Cook Islands (and many other Pacific islands in the region), the reef appears persistently in text and conversation and in the outlook of Cook Islands life. Over the last five years of my research exploring Cook Islands epistemology and ontology, the reef and its persistent, albeit subtle, presence in the vernacular of te iti tangata Māori (Cook Islands Māori society) has made me wonder at how its invocation as a metaphor plays a role in the wider cultural and societal imaginary of Cook Islands Māori peoples. In considering the current theoretical work being undertaken and extended by Indigenous Pacific scholars, the reef has grown into a theoretical post for thinking about both relationality and Indigenous ontology in my work, and is an addition to a tradition of anglophone Pacific theoretical and methodological work that continues to grow.

The Trouble with Metaphors

Most of my graduate training has been in literary studies, and so when using figurative language to do the necessary descriptive work in methodological design, I've often spent longer than I expected in trying to ensure that the metaphor fits. This can be hard. At a workshop I attended recently, the braided river was used to describe the ways bicultural research could be framed when using mixed-methods techniques. This was based on work by Rhiannon Martel *et al*. (2022) and used the intersecting nature of the braided river to metaphorically represent the ways that different worldviews might be distinct but also meet periodically in the research process. Part of me wondered, though, after years considering the ethics of changing the flow of tupuna awa (ancestral rivers) for power generation in the central North

Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, whether the metaphor would still fit or whether it simply required more explanation, given such braids often came from the same source (in the North Island case, the central mountains). Did this still accurately describe two distinct cultural and intellectual knowledge traditions? Did the metaphor need to stretch all the way back to the source? Metaphors are powerful tools, but they also require work or labour to delineate, describe and understand them in their fullness.

I have often been troubled by this in my research work about the Cook Islands and its peoples, particularly when engaging one of the most popular metaphors in our intellectual tradition: the tīvaivai, a large quilt that is iconic of my people's contemporary material culture. Cook Islands women are well known for creating these elaborate and beautifully stitched quilts. They adorn people during some of our most important ceremonies: marriages, funerals, hair-cutting ceremonies, 21st birthdays. In Cook Islands research, the tīvaivai has become almost synonymous with our research heritage. When looking for theoretical and methodological inspiration, the tīvaivai as an epistemology seeded by educationalist Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2001) has become a recognisable term in the Pacific graduate student's frantic search for critical approaches that prescribe a way forward for their oftentimes intimidating research journey. Maua-Hodges's theoretical conceptualisation of the tīvaivai has been called a method, a methodology and a "culturally responsive" framework, and this has been variously described in the methodologies of research projects since Maua-Hodges first began delineating the concept in 2001. Since then, Maua-Hodges's theorisations have been extended by Pacific and non-Pacific scholars across several disciplines (Kokaua *et al*. 2020; Kokaua-Balfour 2019; Ruhe 2021; Tanner 2018).

Indeed, I was one of those graduate students who reached for the familiarity of the tīvaivai as a prospective master's student. In 2012, I sat in my grandparents' garden, scrawling a research proposal for my master of arts application to the University of Auckland. Totally unsure about what I really wanted my project to be about, I got to the part of the application that asked about theoretical and methodological approach and I shoved in a mention of Maua-Hodges's tīvaivai methodology (or was it a method?) without really knowing what it was. I wanted to write about Cook Islands writing and I recognised the tīvaivai as a Cook Islands practice in the theoretical literature, so it seemed appropriate. I did use the tīvaivai in my master's thesis, and I have reflected on that period of preparation and the final thesis many times since completing the project, prompted by students and colleagues who have asked for my thoughts on the effectiveness of the tīvaivai concept in their own work. I have read through countless draft papers where the tīvaivai has been used in similar and new ways, as an extension to Maua-Hodges's foundational work and developed through application

and practice by scholars like Aue Te Ava (Te Ava and Page 2020) and Debi Futter-Puati (Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges 2019). This growing legacy of the tīvaivai within an intellectual genealogy of a Cook Islands and wider Pacific intellectual heritage has prompted me to consider the nature of such methodological legacies, what Pacific researchers recognise in them and why we need to continue deepening their bounds and application.

Across the work mentioned, I have been struck by the ways that such an iconic object in the material culture of the Cook Islands has become so widely abstracted in the esotericism of discipline-specific theorisation. I did this myself when I invoked the parts of Maua-Hodges's theorisation that seemed to fit my literary studies project. I proceeded to draw an entirely different meaning from the tīvaivai's physical form in order to make sense of my thesis structure. Very similar to how Futter-Puati used the tīvaivai "not only as a metaphor but also as a guide" (Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges 2019: 141) in her doctoral work, the tīvaivai became an organisational device in my thesis. As I think about the power of the metaphor in Pacific theoretical frontiers, my early requisition of the conceptual tīvaivai as a metaphor for the research process feels somewhat irresponsible. Rather than a deep reckoning with the relational labour engaged in by va'ine tini (groups of women) in their production of tīvaivai, I projected meaning onto the process of its making and arrangement. I described the so-called patterns on the tīvaivai as conceptually differing "in texture, colour and composition, reflecting the literary diversity of those that are a part of [the Cook Islands literary] field" (Powell 2013: 5) and explained my literature review as a process in which I would "pick and ready the texts and writers for discussion", an interpretation of how cutting paper patterns as a preparatory step for va'ine tini could be paralleled with the scholarly exercise I was undertaking. You understand the gist: I grafted a research method on top of a tīvaivai practice that I did not really know myself. It felt easy to do as a literary studies student, barely trained in the application of literary theory, let alone the breadth of epistemological and ontological thought in Pacific and Cook Islands research at the time. But this is not about shaming my younger self as a scholar. Rather, this reflection helps me to think through what is at stake when using metaphors in Pacific research.

While I can understand how metaphorical interpretations happen and are useful for Pacific scholars, I have felt uncertain about whether we are undertaking an ontological practice that is not very Pacific at all. There is a subtle semantic glaze that pervades our parochial academic chat: ritual and ceremony is mimetic; of course Maui didn't *really* slow the sun; 'Avaiki isn't *really* a place, it's just a metaphor for our ancient genealogies and the place we go to after death. Metaphors. They have a way of making everyday practice beautiful and meaningful but also not quite literal, or even, dare I say it, real.

This is not to say that metaphors have not been put to powerful and research-changing use in the recent decades of Pacific research. The invocation of Pacific iconography and ritual as meaningful research frameworks and methodologies has increased considerably across a wide cross-section of research disciplines, and the development of Pacific research paradigms and methodologies has been a growing conversation amongst Pacific scholars (Naepi 2019; Sanga and Reynolds 2017; Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019). Despite that, their efficacy, I argue, has been rather inconsistent in that in making such symbols and ceremonies only metaphors of real-life Pacific practices—allegories, comparisons and representations—there has been an undermining of the genuine and complex ways that such symbols and ceremonies hold together the web of relationships between Pacific peoples and the islands, lands and waters to which we claim deeply felt kinship and belonging. This has also been noted by Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery (2019: 191). These relationships are not only conceptualised but made real by numerous practices—the various kinds of labour—that Pacific peoples engage in daily. This includes, for example, the commitment of va'ine tini to gathering, designing, talking through and physically stitching their love, hopes and dreams into the fabric they work between their collective fingers.

In the last few years, I have been thinking through tensions between the metaphorical and the literal in the critical framing of my research work. The most enlightening has been my examination of the metaphorical and literal reef. To extend this conversation on the role of metaphor in my research work, I now move to describing how oceanic topography has been used in Indigenous and Pacific research work to date. Below, I refer to some of the key Pacific writers and scholars who have fashioned theoretical discourses informed by the ocean before turning to a specific author who discusses the significance of reef formations: Elizabeth Wright-Koteka (2006), who framed her master's thesis on Cook Islands migration by using a well-known saying about the u'u (parrotfish) and its return to the long reef. I use Wright-Koteka's work primarily to identify how the delineation of metaphors can powerfully scaffold Pacific methodologies and ensure they are efficacious in terms of the questions we ask as Pacific researchers. I also rehearse this Indigenous scholarly tradition of theorising oceanic topography in order to make concluding comments on where I see theorisations like the reef extending discourses about Pacific research design, theory and methodologies.

OCEANIC TOPOGRAPHY AND PACIFIC SCHOLARSHIP

The Ocean in Us: A Tradition of Oceanic Metaphors

The ocean has been invoked in Pacific research over the last 50 years of Pacific scholarship in countless ways, which is unsurprising. In her essay "L(o)osing the Edge" Teaiwa appropriately wrote of Pacific peoples: "No other people have had their history shaped so much by an ocean" (2001:

345). This is clearly demonstrated in the significant volume of critical and creative writing that has deeply engaged with the presence and power of the ocean as a life-giving, connecting and relational body in the Pacific region. Perhaps most famously is Epeli Hau‘ofa’s inversion of the ocean in his seminal essay “Our Sea of Islands” (1994), a theorisation that he elaborated on and put to analytical use in his subsequent writing (see *We Are the Ocean*, 2008). In his essay, Hau‘ofa discursively inverts the smallness and dependence of Pacific nations which had for so long been propagated by dominant external actors (nation-states at the rim, donors). Rather than viewing Pacific islands as isolated and disparate, Hau‘ofa redrew the ocean as the connecting body, the space of comparison and a representation of the abundance and potential of Pacific lives.

Though the ocean has inspired Pacific poets and new cutting-edge theorisations, its topography has also extended the boundaries of its theoretical potential. In 2007, Teaiwa wrote a short entreaty for the collection *A World of Islands* (2007) in which she proposed a rethinking of “the island” as more than a stationary, landed site within a large watery body. The book aimed to celebrate “the wealth and scope of what islands can offer in the search for knowledge and wisdom” (Baldacchino 2007), and in her short contribution, Teaiwa implores the audience to make the word “island” a verb. She writes,

> Let us turn the energy of the island inside out. Let us “island” the world! … Once islanded, humans are awakened from continental fantasies. … Yes, there is a sea of islands. … But let us make “island” a verb. It is a way of living that could save our lives. (Teaiwa 2007: 514)

Such oceanic features are recurring inspirations throughout Teaiwa’s oeuvre. The transformation of the island into a verb feels resonant with the inversion exercise undertaken by Hau‘ofa in his recasting of the ocean: rather than understanding the ocean as a disconnecting and isolating force, Hau‘ofa suggested instead that it was the only body that really *connected* islands and peoples in the region. Similarly, Teaiwa proposed the island not as a sedentary and landed space but as a state of becoming. Indeed, her proposition of the ocean as an edge in her “L(o)osing” article subverts the same dominant attitudes from the Pacific rim that Hau‘ofa disassembled in his own work, and, of course, Teaiwa is also remembered by the immutable sentiments of her words: “We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood” (quoted in Hau‘ofa 2008: 41).

Hau‘ofa and Teaiwa are but two examples of many within the contemporary Pacific intellectual tradition of how the ocean and its topography have inspired innovative and ground-breaking new theories and methodologies. Even in Cook Islands scholarship, the ocean has continued to

inspire cutting-edge critical engagements with the urgent issues of our time. In 2020, Cook Islands and Niue scholar Yvonne Underhill-Sem published her article "The Audacity of the Ocean: Gendered Politics of Positionality", in which she depicts the ocean as underlying a Pacific feminism equipped to engage in decolonial scholarly work. Another Cook Islands scholar, Christina Newport, coined the Vakamoana framework in her doctoral work in 2019. Newport extends the discourse on vaka (ocean-going vessel) voyaging by exploring and applying navigational practices in Cook Islands policy spaces. More pressingly, her work requires a necessary engagement with knowledge of and about the ocean's currents and its relationship with the heavens and the earth in order to see the complex interrelationships between peoples, environment and sustainability. These are but two examples from a much larger body of critical and creative works across the region that have reckoned with the power of salt water in Pacific lives. The discussion that follows ties into this legacy of the ocean as metaphor and theoretical tradition. Inspired by the ways that these authors have used features of the ocean to theorise Indigenous conceptions of relationality across spatial and temporal scales, I have been engaged in both theorising the reef *and* using it to theorise within the Cook Islands context.

An Oceanic Metaphor: The Reef

The reef has arisen time and again in conversations with relations, research collaborators and colleagues when discussing relationality and genealogies in the Cook Islands and the wider Pacific. In those dialogues, the reef is used to mark the amorphous point at which relationships go "beyond" the edge of the home island. Coral reefs are peculiar spaces. In a literal sense, the reef is a place "outside" the island, and yet it is not really a place at all. It is more of an edge. Certainly, many of the reefs that rim the 'enua in the Cook Islands appear as large and jagged shelves and with the swing of tides exist in cyclical states of emergence and submergence. While the reef isn't a boundary that encloses per se, it does help to create both deep and shallow lagoons from and within which Cook Islanders cultivate and harvest seafood and teach their children to swim, a place they traverse in order to fish from the edge of the reef.

In Pacific scholarship, the reef has become a common turn of phrase. Its physical and conceptual presence is very subtle, and yet it connotes an understanding fostered by generations of islanders who have lived within, alongside and beyond it (Vaai 2015). This seems clear from Elizabeth Wright-Koteka's 2006 master's thesis, where she examines the motivations for Cook Islanders' migrations beyond the home islands and the impetus for those who return, either as former emigrants or as descendants of the same. To frame her thesis she uses a saying from the island of Aitutaki in

the Southern Cook Islands, "Te u'u nō te akau roa, ka oki rai a ia ki te akau roa". She offers a translation, "The parrotfish from the long reef will return to the long reef" (2006: 1), and explains further:

> The ancestors in their wisdom noted similarities between the movements of the "uu" [parrotfish] and that of people. Firstly, the ancestors observed that in times of hardship or significant change to people's environment and circumstances, they were inclined to migrate away from the islands. When conditions on the islands improved, like the "uu", they would return. Secondly, the ancestors also understood that despite departing, people maintained a sense [of] belonging to the islands from whence they departed. It was this sense of belonging that kept people connected to the islands and this would ensure that at some stage of their lives, they would return, hence coining the metaphor. (p. 1)

The reef represents a kind of boundary—or perhaps it represents the homeland itself. The parrotfish, influenced by seasonal change and the tide, leaves the reef, and when conditions change, when they improve, it returns to the reef and to its home. Through interviews with emigrants and returned Cook Islanders, Wright-Koteka explores agency and existentialist pull and push factors influencing their movement to and from the home islands, either to join family or to find work and education opportunities. The metaphorical reef underlies Wright-Koteka's work as a broader interpretation of Cook Islands life in its seasons. It provides a broad framing but also one built from an Indigenous ontology that has a cognisance of the contribution of the environment—the reef, in this case—to the rhythm of Cook Islands peoples' lives.

Wright-Koteka reflects on this idea of relocation, movement and settling early in her research where she assumes that the u'u and its movements are dictated by ocean seasons and currents, pulled away and back to the reef through tidal movement. The u'u becomes the analogy for the Cook Islands emigrant in Wright-Koteka's work. The larger oceanic currents are analogous with "historical-structural factors manifest in global inequalities and differences between the Cook Islands and New Zealand" (p. 119) and the need to follow, and be with, one's family, and migration is the "time honoured strategy for improving one's life" (p. 119). One can see how the reef is a useful metaphorical device for understanding what drives the movement of people (or fish) and how we might be able to conceive iterative departure and return not only at the shore but also "at sea" amongst unassailable currents and at offshore formations enabled by the same.

But what *is* the long reef within the Cook Islands imaginary, and how might it usefully frame, edge or indeed slow the larger currents within and beyond which the u'u move? I have come to see that the reef is not an

alternative boundary or border to the home islands, as implied by Wright-Koteka. Her work was timely in that Cook Islands depopulation had become so pervasive in the development and economic discourse during the early 2000s that it had simultaneously created a Cook Islands futurity, one where the Cook Islands would one day be empty of its Indigenous people. As Wright-Koteka's interviews with Cook Islanders showed, and as Hau'ofa and others have persistently argued, such assumptions oversimplify the lives of Pacific peoples. To more accurately identify and theorise Pacific *realities* in the case of movement and migration then, the reef creates the pocket of space beyond diaspora and home island that is needed to do such thinking.

TEI TE AKAU ROA: AT THE LONG REEF

The reef is often used as a reference point, a way to judge spatial scale and temporal distance when talking about migration and return to the ipukarea (homeland). I explore some examples of that here. Migration pervades so many conversations amongst Cook Islands Māori people. It is a fixation on always trying to understand *where* our people are and how we go forward knowing the physical and relational distance amongst our people. After all, if the majority of our people are not located in their ancestral home islands, where then do we locate our nation and, indeed, our future? These distances are constantly shifting with global, neoliberal and modernising currents and have resulted in studies of (and the framing that is) diaspora, migration and development studies and in economic analyses. These discourses attempt to correlate capitalist and economic behaviours with the histories of Indigenous peoples. As Wright-Koteka acknowledges in her work, these larger systems of power have shaped the dominant migration narratives we use; however, Indigenous peoples, including Cook Islands Māori peoples, have also exercised agency within and far beyond these same systems. Wright-Koteka's theorisations of the reef aim to make recognisable that agency by adopting a different cultural lens, a perspective of temporal and spatial distance that does not necessarily fixate on the edge of settler-colonial or Indigenous territory à la Greg Dening (1988) at the beach and shoreline. If anything, the references to the reef in dialogue and text offer a more dynamic conceptualisation of the spaces that are crossed by people and also by power.

In 2020, Canadian journalist Emmanuel Samoglou wrote on the approach of COVID-19 to a, at that time, COVID-free Cook Islands. He'd named his article "Rarotonga: The Threat Beyond the Reef" (2020) and discussed the abrupt change that took hold of Rarotonga with the closing of borders, the disappearance of the tourist industry and the "mild melancholy" he and his family experienced with the unusual "quiet" of Rarotonga. He writes, "As the virus began to take hold in New Zealand, the Cook Islands government appointed an emergency taskforce to prepare the country for the moment it

[COVID-19] would make its way *over the reef*" (my emphasis). His use of the reef to frame a kind of boundary between an interior Rarotonga/Cook Islands and the global currents of the pandemic and consequent economic crisis prompted me, months later, to ask a research participant how she felt about the effect migration had on the strength of familial structures for our people. I'd framed my question, "The papa'anga [genealogical connection] doesn't stop at the reef?" and she'd responded, "No. We [Cook Islanders] exist beyond that. Those relationships prevail beyond that, just like they prevail across time, past and present." In my contemplations of migration, I was also surprised to note the presence of the reef later that year in what seemed an unlikely place. I'd been working with a colleague at the University of Auckland to prepare social media material with students for Cook Islands Language Week 2020. In a video of support from Vae Papatua, a member of the Cook Islands Language Commission and well-known language expert in the home islands, he'd declared:

> Ē i tēia rā, te oronga atu nei te reo 'akameitaki'anga ia tātou, e te iti tangata, tātou i te māro'iro'i nei i te 'akaora i tō tātou reo i *te akau roa* i Aotearoa.
> So today, my word of thanks to our people, our people that are working tirelessly to revive our language in the long reef they call home in Aotearoa.[2]
> (AUCISA Te Maru o Avaiki 2020, my emphasis)

Here, te akau roa—the long reef—appeared not as the boundary between the home islands and elsewhere but as a formation offshore, a gathering place of our people somewhere beyond the edge of the home islands, a place where Cook Islands Māori people are sheltering and engaging with indigeneities in another part of our watery region. These brief examples are by no means the only ones.

In the iterative and persistent appearance of the reef across text and dialogue, the metaphor of te akau roa and the u'u seemed to beckon a more considered theoretical exercise. Its subtle presence as a kind of colloquialism in the vernacular seemed to have deeper connotations underlying it, a reference point for something collectively understood by Cook Islands Māori peoples and in reference to a real and collectively imagined site of refuge, withdrawal and arrival. The power of the reef in theorising relationships and movement across the ocean is its ability to slow our thinking and bring attention to the conceptual space—the ocean—between one location and another. What happens there? What is allowed to happen there?

I am not sure whether Samoglou had deliberately missed the obvious interpretation of the conceptual reef or whether he had simply not spent long enough contemplating the metaphor, but in his evocative reflections on empty roads and melancholic engagements with local Māori, it is clear that

the reef could not stop the threat of COVID-19 in all the ways that matter—and even now, Cook Islands Māori peoples are caught up in the dangerous economic and geopolitical currents that churn at its edges. The narration of relationships not only going beyond the imagined physical location of the reef but "across time, past and present" also seemed to indicate the reef as a site that slows and extends temporal scale, a place where relationality unfolds and is ascertained with an alternative understanding of temporal *distance*. Rather than conflating emigration with the disconnection of Cook Islands peoples from their ancestral soils and their cultural connections, over years and indeed generations, the reef seems able to recalibrate our interpretations of time entirely. Inevitably, this also means that spatial understandings of distance are also rearranged in our conception of the reef. As Papatua acknowledged, in the metaphorical u'u of Cook Islands peoples at the reef that is Aotearoa New Zealand, it seems implied that u'u are not so much lost to the reef but are rather found there, buffeted by currents and sheltered against discourses, politics and systems of power that have oceanic proportions.

CONCLUSION: METAPHORS AND ALL THAT THEY ARE

Is the island moving? Is the ocean in our sweat and in our tears? Can the reef really slow time? Metaphors are powerful research tools in the context of Pacific research. They convey poetics that can beautify Indigenous knowledge traditions and deepen the way we wield that knowledge in our problem-solving and future-building research work. However, these poetics can also run the risk of obscuring those same knowledges in the research context. When I began theorising the reef as a kind of metaphor for the border of island territory and the layering of national, genealogical and cultural identity, it started to become obvious, as with Samoglou's interpretation, that in thinking about the literal, physical, real reef, there was an inconsistency in the rendering of the metaphor: the reef isn't a boundary. Water flows over it and through it, beyond and within it. It is both swamped by and shored up against ocean currents, a topographical feature that encircles, that slows, that drains. My reflections on my use of metaphors in my past methodological work brought my attention to this discrepancy, alerted by a persistent discomfort with the idea that COVID-19 may be the stalking wolf at the gate, or in this analogy, a building wave at the edge of the reef that had not, even with its spray, come inland. This seemed inaccurate. I began, then, to work at why this was, and how, if at all, the metaphor might be reworked to reflect its nature and its presence in the everyday lives of Cook Islands peoples. As I described above, such interpretations and the meanings associated with the reef littered conversations and popular

references throughout Pacific texts. It became obvious that the reef was a powerful site in the imaginary of Cook Islands peoples, as a vantage point offering new dimensions for understanding distances—physical, relational, spatial and temporal—as more than only movement to and from a single and stationary ancestral island home. The reef offers a refreshed way of critically framing migration, agency and even diaspora.

Though I have only briefly explored its theoretical and critical potential here, the reef is a theorised metaphor, a Pacific methodological tool, that is still in its becoming. In theorising the reef, I have found it most useful for understanding how it is analogous to other projects in adjacent fields, as with Wright-Koteka's work, and how it might be a part of a Pacific intellectual tradition that continues to extend metaphorical interpretations in current Pacific methodological and theoretical work. While there is always the easy interpretation of the reef as *only* a metaphor for border and boundary, the preliminary comparative work I have begun here shows that it is a useful way of identifying further scales of distance in the interpretations of ocean and shore, undertaken in Pacific research work to date.

The presence of the reef seems to me to be more than merely a metaphorical and abstracted feature of our island and ocean environs. In the Cook Islands context, it is narrated into a collective imaginary within everyday conversation, a key way that Cook Islands peoples understand spatial and temporal distance and therefore their relationships with those who stay in the home islands and those who go. Distance, much like Hau'ofa's sea of islands, is therefore *not* separation and disconnection at all for the emigrant. It could easily be interpreted as anchoring places outside ancestral islands for our relationships. Such sites do not displace other Indigenous peoples nor necessarily displace the emigrant from their own natal soils, but provide, instead, a conceptual formation to exist offshore and gain new conceptual and literal vantage points. This distinction is important to make. Such formations, even metaphorically, allow intellectual space to consider the agency of the Indigenous Cook Islands emigrant in spite of the larger currents of power at play. Moreover, such metaphorical concepts, like that of the reef, better reflect the lived realities of Cook Islands peoples, as Wright-Koteka herself emphasised in the conclusions of her thesis. Working with the conceptual metaphor of the reef to its very end has helped me to see both what is assumed to be taking place—the reef as boundary—and what is actually at work: the ocean (and those larger discourses) sweeping over that assumed boundary on the swing of tides.

NOTES

1. For example, see writings on the Kakala Research Framework (Johansson Fua 2021) and Su'ifefiloi (Lopesi 2021) as well as privately commissioned reports like that from the Pacific Advisory Group for the Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families in Aotearoa New Zealand with the use of the vaka (ocean-going vessel) (2012). See also articles in this issue by Manu-Sione and Houghton.
2. This translation was given in a personal communication from Eliza Puna.

GLOSSARY

The terms included in this glossary are used in the southern reo Māori languages of the Cook Islands unless otherwise stated.

'enua	islands, lands and waters
ipukarea	homeland
papa'anga	genealogy
(tei) te akau roa	(at) the long reef
te iti tangata Māori	Cook Islands Māori society
tīvaivai	large quilt
tupuna awa	ancestral rivers (Aotearoa Māori)
u'u	parrotfish
va'ine tini	group of women
vaka	ocean-going vessel

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Emma Powell, Te Tumu School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies, The University of Otago, 362 Leith Street, Dunedin North, Dunedin 9016, New Zealand.
emma.powell@otago.ac.nz | https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0680-4264