

Pacific social work and its transformative capability

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Tu mau is a Tokelau phrase meaning ‘stand strong’. *Tu Mau*, a periodic, Pacific-themed special issue of the journal of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), was initiated to encourage Pasifika social workers to write about social work practice from their cultural perspectives. The first *Tu Mau* editors in 2001 stated: “Pacific social workers will continue to develop our practice and an articulation of our practice in various forms, including writing. We look forward to what the future holds for Pacific social work and the future that Pacific social work will help facilitate” (Newport & Mafileo, 2001, p. 2). Hohenberger (2006) concluded her editorial of the second *Tu Mau* with the words “We hope, too, that it [*Tu Mau*] inspires more Pasifika social work practitioners to ‘Tu Mau’ (stand strong), take up the challenge and publish and share our unique cultural inheritances to enrich and further the work of our profession” (p. x). The third *Tu Mau* comprised a collection of papers from the Inaugural National Fono of the ANZASW Pasifika Interest Group, a gathering of Pacific social and community workers from around New Zealand, which, Dalhousie (2010) reflects, was a day which ‘shone the light on Pacific innovations’. This fourth *Tu Mau*, published 17 years since the first issue, reflects the strengthening of social work practice and scholarship from Pacific and Pasifika perspectives which has taken place over time.

We are now in that future mentioned in the first *Tu Mau*. What has changed over that time? How have we stood tall? What are our strengths and what are the challenges we face? What might lie ahead?

Looking at numbers, there has certainly been a strengthening of Pasifika social

work in New Zealand. The election of Sally Dalhousie to the ANZASW Board in 2017 made history as she is the first Pasifika person (exclusive of Māori as Tangata Whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand) to be on the governing body of the profession in Aotearoa New Zealand. Across the country, social workers of Pacific ethnicities make up around 7% of all registered social workers, according to SWRB records in March 2018, which is similar to the percentage of those of Pacific ethnicities in the total Aotearoa New Zealand population. Of all social work students in this country, however, 17% were of Pacific ethnicities (SWRB, 2017 Education Providers Report), so it is expected the proportion of social workers of Pacific ethnicities will grow. Anecdotally, the numbers of social work educators of Pacific ethnicities in New Zealand has grown from around five at the time of the first *Tu Mau* in 2001, to at least 15 in 2018. While this is partly a reflection of the proliferation of social work education providers over this period, it likely also reflects the strengthening of the Pasifika social work workforce and qualification levels alongside educational institutions recognising the need for Pasifika content within their programmes. In 2001, at the time of the first *Tu Mau*, there were no PhD-qualified Pasifika social work educators in New Zealand institutions, whereas now there are at least six PhD qualified Pasifika ethnicity social work educators throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. More data are needed to map and strategise for the strengthening of Pasifika social work, not only in Aotearoa New Zealand, but in Pacific Island nations and across the Pacific diaspora.

Internationally, Pacific scholarship led by Pacific peoples has been building momentum

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in recent years and to some extent, this has occurred in the social work discipline as well (for example: Crichton-Hill, 2018; Halaevalu and Godinet, 2014; Ravulo, Mafile'o, & Yeates, 2019). Alliances between the Pasifika diaspora and development initiatives within Pacific Island nations and territories are an important part of the context of Pacific social work scholarship seeking to improve transnational Pacific family and community wellbeing. Recent collaborations amongst Pacific social work educators across the region, such as the establishment of the Social Work Regional Resource Centre of Oceania under the International Association of Schools of Social Work, go some way toward realising such alliances. The diversity of contributors in this issue of *Tu Mau* stems in part from such region-wide initiatives. Of all the *Tu Mau* issues to date, this issue has the most contributions written by authors working outside of Aotearoa New Zealand. Contributions are written from authors based in Samoa (Pala'amo, 2019), Papua New Guinea (Lawihin, 2019) and also Australia (Ravulo, 2019; Saxton, 2019). This issue also has a higher proportion of articles addressing Pacific social work education (Ikiua, 2019; Lawihin, 2019; Ravulo, 2019) and research (Pala'amo, 2019; Saxton, 2019).

Contemporary Pacific social work is facing some major challenges. Neo-liberal political agendas have fuelled increasing inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand which has adversely affected Pasifika peoples, for example, in income, wealth, housing, health and education (Marriott & Sim, 2015). The evidenced based practice debates, the social investment approach and big data used to determine social service delivery creates an environment which stands counter to the core of Pacific social work—relationality, spirituality, service, reciprocity and collectivity. Instead of a context conducive to recognising and harnessing creativity and diversity, there is the idea that the expertise needed for this context is found in *other* places (for example, Australia, Scotland or USA). Pacific social work is about celebrating the local. The challenge is to

work with the tension between the local and the international, ensuring we value what happens locally in the Pacific. As with earlier issues of *Tu Mau*, this issue is a vehicle for social work in New Zealand, and indeed the region, to articulate, value and share local Pacific perspectives for social work practice, education and research.

This issue contains five articles, three viewpoints and one book review. The articles and viewpoints contain three themes: research, education and fields of practice. Professor Steven Ratuva opens the issue with a piece on social work in the Pacific from a non-social work perspective. He outlines the Pacific context, highlighting the norms that exist in Pacific societies and the health and social issues that are present. Social work, suggests Ratuva, can capture the sociological imagination by engaging in political action, making a stand, and transforming practice beyond the restrictions imposed by bureaucratic systems and processes. Social workers should, therefore, stand against the racism and stereotyping of Pacific people and work to de-mythologise Pacific cultures. The viewpoint explores how social workers can work in strategic and empowering ways to support Pacific people to engage their cultural knowledge to adapt to current and future challenges.

Next, Kate Saxton presents a reflective piece about using participatory action methodology to research Fiji social work. The viewpoint notes that, in terms of research, the impact of colonisation is clearly visible in Fiji through the dominance of Western theories and research methods. Western researchers, even when focused on eliminating oppression and marginalisation, can face challenges when conducting research in Pacific nations. She provides insight as to how non-Pacific social work researchers can privilege cultural needs and Pacific epistemologies in any research they might conduct with Pacific people.

In the third viewpoint article, Rachel Enosa, Fa'amatuainu Tino Pereira, Seini Taufa,

Gerardine Clifford-Lidstone and Akesa Filimoehala-Burling offer a focus on a field of practice in the operationalisation of a Pacific family violence programme. In their article, *Nga Vaka o Kaiga Tapu*, the authors background the development of ethnic-specific Pacific family violence frameworks before addressing the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of Pacific training programmes. While the focus here is on family violence, the success factors identified by the authors would apply to any Pacific education programme.

Alesana Fosi Pala'amo, in his article *Tafatolu (three-sides): A Samoan research methodological framework* addresses research, in his exploration of the synthesis of a Samoan cultural methodology with contemporary academic approaches to qualitative research via a methodological framework he has named Tafatolu. The author's own doctoral study on the counselling practices of ministers in Samoa forms the foundation upon which the synthesis of research methodologies is explored. Pala'amo locates the Tafatolu framework in the context of Samoan culture but notes that the framework could resonate for researchers from other Pacific and indigenous cultures.

The focus on social work education begins with an article by Jay Hikuleo Ikiua on *Pasifika pedagogies in an indigenous tertiary environment*. The article explores what makes for a positive learning environment for Pasifika students enrolled in a social work degree programme. Ikiua explores culturally responsive pedagogies in retort to the domination of Western pedagogies which so often seem to dominate social work education. In *Culturally relevant pedagogy for social work learning in Papua New Guinea*, Dunstan Lawihin explores how ethnic specific teaching methods might be used in the delivery of social work education in Papua New Guinea. In particular, Lawihin highlights how the Melanesian way and Melanesian pedagogy can enhance student understanding of social work models and their application in the field education

setting. He reminds us to examine the knowledge base that underpins social work education and to pay mind to the cultural context within which that education is delivered. Continuing the focus on social work education, Jioji Ravulo in his article, *Australian students going to the Pacific Islands: International social work placements and learning across Oceania*, explores both the benefits and the challenges of international social work placements, and the reasons why students and educators might promote them. Ravulo reports on the experiences of social work students who undertook field placements in the Pacific region and from this work provides a Pacific model to support Pacific social work education.

Fields of practice forms the focus of the article on *Noqu Vale: Community organisation professionals' views on what works and what needs to change for Pasifika housing* by Joanna Camaira and Tracie Mafile'o. The authors report on work conducted as part of a Master's of Applied Social Work research project into Pasifika housing from the views of community organisation professionals located in the Wellington region. The authors argue that understanding social, political and cultural contexts and engagement in advocacy, empowerment, collaboration and holistic practice should sit at the heart of social work approaches to Pasifika housing concerns.

Finally, the issue finishes with a review by Niukini Hendriske and Melvin Apulu of a book addressing transnational Pacific Social Work.

It has been a pleasure to edit Tu Mau. We have found it encouraging to work with the authors who have provided us with such a rich and diverse range of articles. As a whole, this body of work on Pacific social work highlights the challenges that exist in positioning the Pacific voice in, often non-Pacific, social work contexts. That said, another voice emerges from the articles; a voice that prioritises the value that Pacific cultures bring to social work research,

education and practice. We must continue our efforts to discuss and write about Pacific social work and its transformative capability.

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