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The Significance of Stories

In my view, indigeneity can be defined as the identity of indigenous people which embodies land, ocean, culture, language, spirituality, knowledge and history. In this article, I will discuss how storytelling enhances and maintains the understanding of this definition of indigeneity, and I will compare other views of indigeneity with my own. My mother-in-law Elisapeta Tano (Peta) has gifted me numerous stories about Tonga and her Tongan identity, which Taungapeau (2010) calls "Tongan-ness". As the mother of my wife, I consider Peta to be like another mother to me. She has become a part of my personal knowledge development. Therefore, I will utilise autoethnography and tell my story of discovery and learning with Peta and demonstrate the significance of stories to strengthening the understanding of indigeneity.

Understanding indigeneity involves actively listening to the stories of indigenous people. Gerharz, Uddin, and Chakkarath (2018) explain that "indigeneity is intrinsically related to history" (p. 173). The history of a people is embodied in their stories. Cuthers (2018a) reaffirms this stating, "Our stories are our history" (p. 367). Therefore, listening to Peta's stories and placing myself in those stories enables me to learn about her indigeneity. My wife, Nanise, belongs to Tonga and in July 2018 our family made the journey to the Kingdom of Tonga. My family on this trip consisted of my wife and our three children, Kelekolio, Antonia and Eli, my wife's parents, Paula and Peta, my sister-in-law, Tokilupe, her husband, Alan, and their son, Lachlan. According to Cuthers (2018c), returning to the land helps to foster knowledge. Connecting to the land has the power to trigger memories of past events relating to the land which, in turn, can work to reclaim forgotten stories. Therefore, our trip was more than a family

holiday; it was an opportunity to rediscover these connections through Peta's stories which will enhance my children's "Tongan-ness".

My mother-in-law, Peta, is an excellent storyteller. She is very humorous, engaging and honest. She tells stories about both 'the good' and 'the not-so-perfect' aspects of her family history and her stories allow me to view "Tongan-ness" through her eyes. When discussing Tongan history, His Royal Highness Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka Ata states that storytellers were the preservers of traditional knowledge in Tonga (Scarr, Gunson, & Terrell, 1998). Having listened to Peta's stories, I recognise that storytellers still have a role in preserving traditional knowledge. Peta knows many stories of her ancestors and her family. In retelling the stories of our ancestors, we enhance our knowledge (Cuthers, 2018c). Therefore, I actively listen to Peta's stories because her stories will eventually become my wife's and children's stories and their knowledge which will enable me to understand my wife and children better. Through Peta's stories, I have learnt much about her Tongan story and the significance of her culture and traditions, stories which are significant to my children and will strengthen their "Tongan-ness". Scarr, Gunson, and Terrell (1998) agree that tradition preserves identity; therefore, storytelling maintains indigeneity.

Peta's late father, Viliami Uele Fahiua, was affectionately known as Uele. Peta holds knowledge of the surname "Fahiua" which is the story of her grandfather, Mosese Fakatu'anoa. Mosese journeyed from the island of Uvea to Vava'u. The distance is vast from Uvea to Vava'u, the journey of which is no easy feat in a boat. However, Hau'ofa (2008) says the people of Oceania were at home with the sea and had developed great skills for navigation. The story of Mosese's journey validates what Hau'ofa narrates about the people of Oceania and demonstrates how the ocean is a component of our indigeneity. It is not just the land but also the ocean that surrounds these lands which is our home. Tahitian politician Tuheiava believes that "we are the ocean" (Wilson Anastasios, 2018, p. 47). When Mosese landed in Vava'u, he met with the high chief Luani, who introduced him to his friend Koloamatangi who worked for a King called Vuna in Pangaimotu. Mosese joined Koloamatangi in service to Vuna and for his services Mosese received the name Fahiua meaning "smash in two". Mosese married a Tongan woman named Vika, and among their children they had Peta's father, Uele. This

story, embodied in the name Fahiua, describes Mosese's connection to the ocean and the land and enables his descendants to understand their connection to Vava'u.

Indigeneity incorporates our spiritual connection to our ancestors and how, through story, we can enhance that connectedness. According to Gilchrist (2011), the lives and stories of ancestors become our own stories and part of our own identity. Peta says her father Uele was a very religious man, and he prayed "all the time". He prayed unapologetically and with conviction. She recalls that he prayed so loudly, almost as if he was screaming the prayers, that all who lived near their family home could hear the prayers from their homes. She recounts that if she or her siblings could not sing the church songs "properly" he would make them continuously sing until they were able. No matter where he was, even if he was at work among his colleagues, he would stop what he was doing and start praying. Peta recalls that as a child she always felt embarrassed about the way her father behaved regarding prayer. However, Peta's faith, instilled in her by her parents as a child, has been nurtured and has continued to grow since that time and now she is deeply religious and tends to reference aspects of her deep faith during her conversations with me. In a way, her father's story has become her own. I now have a better understanding of Peta.

Indigeneity can be enhanced when we place ourselves in the stories of our ancestors. Cuthers (2018c) believes the stories of our ancestors contribute to both our historical and contemporary knowledge. Peta says that Uele worked as a police officer. However, after asking other family members for their stories about Uele, together we discovered that Uele was also a traditional healer or "faito'o". We uncovered stories of how Uele used to travel to homes and heal "Tongan sickness". This "mahaki faka Tonga" is a sickness that is peculiarly Tongan and can only be healed by Tongan methods (Herda, Terrell, & Gunson, 1996). This aspect of Uele's life was a discovery for Peta which was the result of actively searching for family stories of her father. It demonstrates that when we seek out stories of our ancestors, we re-discover (k)new knowledge (Rangiwai, 2018). Therefore, we need to actively ask questions about our ancestors that may otherwise remain locked away in the memories of our family and once the memories are unlocked communicate these memories to the next generations to keep our stories, our history, alive.

Furthermore, by re-discovering family knowledge through stories we heighten the understanding of ourselves and deepen our understanding of our indigeneity.

Retelling stories of the traditional roles that our ancestors held enables understanding of our indigeneity. Cuthers (2018c) believes the stories embodied by our ancestors help develop knowledge. Faito'o are described as the traditional healers who treat 'avanga (spirit sickness) (Herda et al., 1996). Apart from this discovery, there is little more known to us about Uele and his role as a faito'o at present. However, Finau (2016) believes that "faito'o is an important part of history that keeps memories alive" (p.9). The knowledge that he was a faito'o is a story of the man that should be retold and never forgotten. According to Scarr, Gunson, and Terrell (1998), most traditional healers served an apprenticeship from their childhood through a close association with a healer who was either their mother, aunt or a male relative. Therefore, Uele's ability to faito'o is hereditary and part of his descendant's bloodline. Portillo (2017) points out that "blood memories are tied to the body and provide indigenous centred ways of experiencing one's history" (p. 2). Uele's blood carries memories of his ancestors who nurtured his role as a faito'o. These ancestors and their stories are present in his blood, and this story provides awareness to his descendants that this ability is present in their bloodline and part of their family knowledge. On reflection of Uele's story, I feel encouraged to search out more of my own blood stories.

The story of Uele's death adds further insight into his role as a faito'o and enhances knowledge of his indigeneity. Rangiwai (2018) says that once we access our stories we can review and develop (k)new knowledge. There is knowledge contained in the story of Uele's death which emphasises how spiritual he was. Peta explains that Uele foresaw the time and place that he would die. She says he gathered his family in his home on his land in Neiafu, Vava'u, the place of his birth. The land was important to him, and he had always told his family that if he died to take him back to Vava'u. This insight supports Wilson's (2008) view that indigenous people have a spiritual connection to the land. Uele gathered his family one evening. He had told them he would die at 8 pm. They prayed together as a family and immediately after the prayers had finished, Uele stretched out his legs, laid back and passed away at 8 pm just as he had foretold. This story of his death is embodied in the name of one of his granddaughters "Ilopau

'Ofa ki Sia". "Ilopau" is taken from the Tongan word "ilo ke pau" which means 'to know for certain' or 'wisdom', signifying his certainty of knowledge of the time and date of his death. "Ofa ki Sia" expresses love to his place of rest and to heaven, signifying Uele's final place of physical rest and also the beginning of his journey to heaven. Cuthers (2018c) agrees that names can symbolise our story and in reflecting on this story we understand how spirituality contributes to our indigeneity.

Genealogy helps bind us to our indigeneity. Ka'ili (2017) agrees that genealogies are an anchor for claims to indigeneity. Uele married Melesivale who was the eldest daughter of a Methodist church minister, Sione Taufua, and his wife, Siulolovao. Sione died before Peta was born. However, she spent much time with her grandmother, Siulolovao. Siulolovao was the daughter of Tevita Manu Pasikala and Fusipala. Tevita Manu was the son of Mahe'uli'uli and Pauline Lupe who was the daughter of Tupoutoutai. Fusipala was the eldest daughter of Kalaniuvalu and Susana Motulalo. Kalaniuvalu was the son of the last Tu'i Tonga (King of Tonga), Laufilitonga. Queen Salote stated that chiefly blood counts for more than lineal descent (Herda et al., 1996). Peta's genealogy embodies substantial chiefly blood that embeds her into the narrative of Tonga and compliments her "Tongan-ness". Peta was previously unaware of some of her illustrious ancestors, and I was fortunate enough to re-discover these important ancestral connections with her. Unfortunately, not all individuals have prominent ancestors that enable the capability to trace them which demonstrates the importance of recording all our ancestors who are known. My encouragement and promotion of Peta's "Tongan-ness" has reconnected Peta with her ancestors and, as a result, connected my children with more of their Tongan genealogy. Peta believes it is important for her children and her grandchildren to understand these connections and, moreover, the generations to come will know these important connections as well.

Our genealogies are layered with stories of our ancestors which contribute to our indigeneity. Rather than being simply lists of names and descent, genealogies tell of the passing of power from one line to another (Scarr et al., 1998). Each name in a genealogy has a story attached to it which we can reflect on to enhance knowledge of self and strengthen mana which, in turn, works to enhance understanding of indigeneity (Cuthers, 2018c). When Peta discusses her ancestor Tu'i

Tonga Laufilitonga, she says he was a famous and great king of high rank in times past. Peta discusses how significant her ancestor still is today and recounts the story of when Her Royal Highness Princess Mele Siu'ilikutapu introduced Peta to her daughter-in-law Maasi Kalaniuvalu saying, "Oku mau kui taha" which translated means, "We share the same ancestor". Peta and Her Royal Highness Princess Mele Siu'ilikutapu both descend from Tu'i Tonga Laufilitonga. Cuthers (2018b) believes it is through our ancestors that we can express to others who we are, where we belong and how we belong. Our ancestor's stories anchor us into the story of the land and these stories enhance our indigeneity.

In treasuring our ancestors, we shape our indigeneity and our culture. Smolenyak (2002) believes that if we honour our ancestors we honour ourselves. While in Tonga in July 2018 we journeyed to Lapaha to see the langi (royal tomb) of the last Tu'i Tonga Laufilitonga. As we made our way there, Peta was adamant that her daughter Tokilupe and my daughter Antonia could not go on the langi unless they wore Tongan attire. Peta explained that wearing Tongan attire was a necessity as it was a show of respect since the langi was a sacred place, demonstrating how she treasures her ancestors. Furthermore, it demonstrates how treasuring our ancestors fosters and transmits culture. Once we were on the langi, Peta repeatedly spoke in Tongan, then periodically in English she would repeatedly say that we were on a sacred place. She was mindful of where we stood, and she was constantly directing my children where to step as she did not want them to desecrate the langi. We then moved to the Paepae 'o Tele'a langi, and Peta said she felt "warm inside" as she knew she was among family. The previous two Kalaniuvalu were buried at this langi; Peta's mother's second cousin, Kalaniuvalu Ngalumoetutulu, and his son, Peta's third cousin, Kalaniuvalu Tiofilusi Fatu'langi. Being among family made Peta happy and emotional. She spoke to the langi and said, "Kalaniuvalu, I bring you my mokopuna to see you". Peta's ancestors and family were all around us at these langi and witnessing her treasure them has encouraged me to continue to do the same with my own ancestors.

Emotions can stimulate memories which contain many stories which need to be retold to strengthen our indigeneity. According to Rodriguez and Fortier (2007), history is the memory of things said and done. Peta retold the story of when her grandmother Siulolovao died in Kolofou. She said

Siulolovao's mother's family, specifically her mother's (Fusipala's) brother's descendants, came "wearing the big mats". This story demonstrates Siulolovao as being of significance to her family as her mother's brother's family played the "lioni" role at the funeral (James, 2002). Lioni wear "big mats", which are the largest, most tattered ta'ovala (mats), to show their respect for the deceased and is played by the descendants of the deceased's mother's brother(s). Siulolovao was their "mehikitanga" or of their father's sister's line. Siulolovao's first cousins recognised her place in their family in this story.

Wood-Ellem (1999) explains that aristocrats were those chiefs, especially women, whose descent from the sacred Tu'i Tonga gave them special privileges. Because of her place in the Tu'i Tonga family Siulolovao was a woman of high rank. According to Queen Salote, the degree of the chiefness of a person is derived from the closeness of their kinship relationship with the Tu'i Tonga line (Wood-Ellem, 2004). Siulolovao was a great-grandchild of the last Tu'i Tonga, and a grandchild of Kalaniuvalu, descended from them through her mother. Biersack (1987) explains that in Tongan culture the mother's blood carries more weight than the father's. Siulolovao carried Tu'i Tonga blood which had been passed down to her through a female line and is present in her descendants including her daughter (Peta's mother) Melesivale, her granddaughter Peta, Peta's two daughters and their children. This blood connects them to the history and prestige of the Tu'i Tonga even today. This blood is not restricted by time or distance and the story held in this blood can foster a sense of belonging for all future generations living all around the world, binding them to their homeland. Portillo (2017) believes that "nothing defines indigenous people more than belonging to a place, a homeland" (p. 15).

There are stories in the places that our ancestors once occupied that maintain our indigeneity. Merlan (2009) agrees, explaining that indigeneity implies a deeply felt process of attachment. Peta and I were discussing the funeral of Siulolovao which was carried out at her home, and she recalls that the noble Kalaniuvalu Semisi and his brother 'Asipeli Fotofili took turns sitting under the mango tree to oversee the food preparation for the funeral which Peta describes as them showing love for their first cousin, Siulolovao. Peta said Kalaniuvalu and Siulolovao were close and that Siulolovao was always with her Tu'i Tonga family. Peta remembers that

Kalaniuvālu was very welcoming and was a humble family man. Kalaniuvālu's humility was demonstrated in this story when he carried out his duty according to the Tongan custom, a duty which he did not see as being beneath him. According to Cuthers (2018c), chiefs are a symbol of the family knowledge which includes accomplishments and traits. I have met many of Peta's family, and they are welcoming and humble, qualities which would seem to derive from their chief. Stories of our chiefs help explain the way in which we behave today (Cuthers, 2018c).

Our family stories enable us to understand our indigeneity and how we belong. According to Posesi-Fanua and Wimberg-Webster (1996), stories of the relationships between family and community describe customs that enclose those relationships. Peta recalls that at the funeral of Siulolovao, Kaimani Vulangi Finau, son of the noble 'Ulukalala who was a relative of Siulolovao on her father's side, was going to take Siulolovao to the grave site. However, Afui, son of Kalaniuvālu Semisi, also wished to take her and in the end, it was he who drove his truck into the front yard, placed Siulolovao on the back of it and took her to the grave site. At the cemetery, ha'a tufunga (undertakers) took care of the burial procedures. Lepa Kupu, another grandson of Laufilitonga, carried out the talking on behalf of the Tu'i Tonga family. All these people came together to bury Siulolovao because they were her family. This family was who she was, who she contributes to and who her descendants are because blood (toto) is one's own forever (Herda et al., 1996). They belong to a place, they belong to a family, and there are customs surrounding this family that are detailed in their burial procedures. Stories enable understanding of how Peta and her family belong to the Tu'i Tonga family and how the customs related to the Tu'i Tonga can shape their indigeneity.

Our family stories and stories held within our genealogies are extremely important in understanding our indigeneity and how we fit into the world. Smolenyak (2002) acknowledges that we can learn about identity from our ancestors and genealogy provides a sense of community and belonging. Peta tells a story which demonstrates this. The late Kalaniuvālu Ngalumoetutulu, son of the late Kalaniuvālu Semisi, married Her Royal Highness Princess Mele Siu'ilikutapu. The father of Her Royal Highness Princess Mele Siu'ilikutapu, His Royal Highness Prince Tu'ipelehake, had passed away in Auckland. Peta went with her cousins, 'Anau and 'Ofa, and husband,

Paula, to see Kalaniuvalu Ngalumoetutulu at his Auckland home in Mangere called Faonelua to offer their support for the funeral. They went to Kalaniuvalu because, as descendants of Fusipala and therefore Kalaniuvalu, he was the head of their family. Peta said he sat on a chair and they all sat on the floor to show they were respectful to him. She said Kalaniuvalu was like his father Kalaniuvalu Semisi; he loved his family and was very welcoming. She said he told his matāpule (spokesman), Tu'uhoko ki langi, "Koe fanga mokopuna ē 'ae Tu'i Tonga 'ae pē fo'i toko tolu ko ē", which means, "Those three there (indicating to Peta, 'Anau and 'Ofa) are the grandchildren of Tu'i Tonga". Peta explains that even though Kalaniuvalu could have said that they were the grandchildren of Siulolovao or the great-grandchildren of Fusipala, he explicitly recognised their descent from Tu'i Tonga Laufilitonga. This demonstrates Mahina's view (1986) that from a woman the blood flows but from men titles flow. Tu'i Tonga blood embodied in the women descendants of Tu'i Tonga was reaffirmed that night and continues to play its part in Peta's contemporary identity further demonstrating how we are part of our ancestor's story, just as they are part of ours (Cuthers, 2018b).

Throughout this journey of helping my mother-in-law Peta to strengthen her "Tongan-ness", she came to the realisation that she held within her many stories and therefore much knowledge. She realised the true value of such stories which she had previously taken for granted. She realised that although she and other family members of her generation were familiar with these stories that had she not shared these stories with me, then her children and grandchildren would likely never know them. At the same time, she was saddened by the realisation of all the stories held by past generations of her family members that were never passed on and have now been lost. She feels a sense of loss that she did not spend more time asking stories from or about her grandmother or her father. She is comforted, however, in knowing the importance of telling and retelling her stories now and that some are now recorded for her descendants which will contribute to their "Tongan-ness".

Indeed, storytelling enhances and maintains the understanding of indigeneity or the identity of indigenous people. Our stories are significant and hold much knowledge about ourselves, including knowledge of our connection to the land and sea which are part of our identity. Furthermore, our spiritual connection to our ancestors can be enhanced by

storytelling. We need to unlock the memories and stories of our ancestors, and as we tell their stories, we begin to make their stories our own. All our family stories are important as they help us to understand ourselves and each other better. These stories need to be retold and passed on to the next generation since our knowledge and our identity may be lost with our ancestors; therefore, it is important we keep them alive in our stories.

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