



POSTCOLONIALISM AND RELIGIONS



Theologies from the Pacific

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Postcolonialism and Religions

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TALAMU‘A

This book joins the “Prophets from the South” project of the Council for World Mission (CWM). Previous publications in that project focused on an influential theologian from different parts of the global south. Thus far, the project has engaged the works of M.M. Thomas of India, Shoki Coe of Taiwan, and Allan Aubrey Boesak of South Africa. This book is the turn of Pasifika (Pacific Islands, Oceania). The invitation from CWM was for a publication on the works of Sione ‘Amanaki Havea (1922–2000), who was born in Tonga and committed to the Pasifika region.

PASIFIKA

“Pasifika” (or Pasefika) is a nativizing of the designations that colonialists gave our region—“Pacific” Ocean and Islands (attributed to the Portuguese navigator, Ferdinand Magellan). This is not because we accept the invasion and colonization of our seas and islands, but in order to appropriate a foreign term to suit our native tongues. In other words, “Pasifika” is our way of doing to the language of others as others have done to ours.

Prior to the arrival of European explorers and colonizers, our region was known by many local names. For example, *Moana nui a kiwa* and *‘Otu motu* referred to the waters, reefs and islands that spread in the *moana* (sea, ocean) between Hawai’i (northeast), Palau and Papua (northwest), Aotearoa (southwest) and Rapa Nui (southeast). This work brings some of the theological insights from this wide oceanic space.

It should be noted, however, that regionalization and regionalism are colonial activities. They feed (upon) the imagination of individuals, conglomerations, and governments that declare control over a collective of areas and sovereignties. Overlooking differences and assuming unity give colonizers the license to declare that they have discovered, captured, and own (is)lands and regions. This work resists this colonial agenda, through theological reflection and engagement from Pasifika.

PASIFIKA THEOLOGIES

The invitation from CWM was for a publication on the works of Sione 'Amanaki Havea. However, in the spirit of 'Amanaki (Tongan name for "anticipation and hope"), this book does *not* focus on his few publications and many talks (formal and on the slow run, for he was a heavy islander). Rather, this book gathers the insights and visions of present theologians and activists who work in and for the interest of Pasifika. In Pasifika, theology is not the work of a single person but a collaboration among the living (old and young), and between the living with the ancestors who continue to be present in the eyeing (is)lands, in the breaking waters, in the whispering plants, in the humble creatures, and in the unseen *mana* (power, influence) that continue to give breath to the region. This book is such a collaboration.

'Amanaki is remembered as an accomplice in waking the waves of local theologies at a time when Pasifika churches were active in seeking self-determination and freedom from political and mission colonization. Pasifika was slowly catching its breath in the 1950s after the "Pacific War" between foreign empires, and Samoa was the first to gain independence in 1962. Other island groups followed in the flow to nationhood, with the support and guidance of churched natives, but many island groups still remain shackled. Still. Even today, Kanaky, Ma'ohi Nui, Rapa Nui, West Papua, Hawai'i, Tutuila, Guam, and the 14 clusters of islands in the Mariana archipelago. Until these islands are also free, Pasifika is not free.

In the 1950s, parts of the Pasifika islands and waters continued to be raped by the testing of atomic bombs and poisoned with the nuclear waste of the British, French, and American empires. These acts of violence continued into the 1990s, and the radioactivity of nuclear waste will last for several generations. 'Amanaki and his accomplices theologized in response

to these struggles as matters of life and justice, rather than as topics for contextual theologizing. They learned the rhetoric later, but theology in Pasifika in the 1950s and 1960s was about life and justice, collaboration and solidarity, rather than theory, methodology, or doctrines (obsessions of the theological academy).

The legacies of war and occupation are drowned out in the current attention to climate change—the burden of the carbon civilization and global development that Pasifika too has to shoulder—which is another link on the shackle of colonization. The Covid-19 pandemic adds another link, causing doors and borders to close, gatherings to cancel, economies to flop, and fears to multiply. In other words, Pasifika will not be free for some time.

In the meantime, there is space for Pasifika people to free our minds and faiths. For sure, it was not a clean break from the ways of the former masters, who profited from shackling Pasifika (and other regions). Systems, structures, cultures, and ideologies that became normal in over two hundred years of colonial rule are part of the colonial legacy that remains with us to this day. But there is space to contemplate and to chart forward politically, economically, spiritually, and theologically.

The reawakening of the peoples of Pasifika to our cultural and indigenous roots, ways and knowledges, religions and identities, has led to significant local alternatives. Among those alternatives are distinctive theologies that natives of Pasifika (at home and in the diaspora) can understand, relate to, identify with, supplement, and negotiate. These theologies initially came to be recognized by symbolic terms such as “Pacific way,” “Pacific theology” and “coconut theology.” Nowadays, we refer to them as Pasifika theologies, noting both their inclusive and incorporating aspect as well as their pluralistic and collaborative nature.

‘Amanaki and the collaborators in his generation (like Setareki Tuilovoni of Fiji and Vavae Toma of Samoa, and many other wise natives with explosive minds) got us started on naming and explaining the theologies in and of Pasifika, rooted in and appropriate for our (is)lands, waters and ways, and this book is our invitation to the generations to come to be “prophets of the south” in and for Pasifika. May the next collaboration include more women and younger authors, born and raised at the home(is)lands and in the diaspora; and authors from islands—free or not free—not (re) present(ed) in this book.

Finally, to future generations of Pasifika, we plead: collaborate and publish before all of our native wisdoms, ways, and theologies are gathered, published, copyrighted, and owned, by researchers and theologians from outside of the region. Let them come; but let us not be silent. Speak. Talk back. Propagate. Advocate. Push back. Write. Lest Pasifika will never be free.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Work on this book was supported by Council for World Mission.

Praise for *Theologies from the Pacific*

“This is an important collection and collaboration between Pacific theologians, scholars, artists, and advocates who truly understand how to weave together past and present spiritual, political, and cultural concepts and forces shaping the Blue Pacific. They also know what’s missing, and have signaled the need for younger voices, women, and people of all genders to join the *talanoa* and the movement for a sea of theologies in a liberated Oceania.”

—Katerina Teaiwa, Professor in Pacific Studies, *Australian National University, Australia*

“As a scholar of contextual biblical hermeneutics and theology, I have waited for some time for such a volume from Pasifika. Gathering the voices of Pasifika theologians and activists, Jione Havea has put together an anthology which is more than a worthy sequel to the ‘Prophets from the South’ project of the Council for World Mission. *Theologies from the Pacific* is not only a welcome addition but will make a significant contribution to global theological education.”

—Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, President and Professor of Hebrew Bible, *Claremont School of Theology, USA*

“I have longed and waited for a theology emerging from the vast, deep, unpredictable—at times calm, at times turbulent—waters of the Pacific. That day has finally arrived! Like the soaring and roaring waves of the Pacific, Pasifika theologies are now soaring to new heights and roaring mightily to claim their rightful place in history. I welcome *Theologies from the Pacific* with excitement!”

—Eleazar S. Fernandez, President and Professor of Constructive Theology, *Union Theological Seminary, The Philippines*

“*Theologies from the Pacific* advances the project of illuminating the depths, fluidity, and plurality of the divine (*‘otua*) this side of the heavens (*itua-lagi*). These provocative essays, comprising the second wave of Pasifika theologies, navigate their ‘roots’ to create new ‘routes’ for indigenous

voices and those who must be freed from colonizing impulses. Here is a God who understands dirt and water, impermanence, and life's inextricability from the created world that sustains us all."

—Elaine A. Robinson, Professor of Methodist Studies and Christian Theology, *Saint Paul School of Theology, USA*

"*Theologies from the Pacific* takes the reader on a journey where they can engage with the lived theologies of Pasifika. It is a timely masterpiece of incredible scholarship that provides challenging and transformative insights into issues of sexuality, climate justice, postcolonial critique and contextual theology. Each chapter offers prophetic theological engagements through a combination of personal reflection, lived religiosity, historical analysis, biblical hermeneutics, and liberative theology; the book is both engaging and life-affirming throughout."

—Eve R. Parker, *Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, UK*

"The Pacific islands are still mostly overflowed by the airplanes and attentions of continental powers that have long overfished their waters and overdetermined their political and economic fate, leaving an overburdening footprint both colonial and radioactive. But in this volume, the overlooked culture, faith, and underrepresented theological voices of Pasifika are curated and celebrated.

Jione Havea has cast a broad net into this 'sea of theologies,' gathering in widely diverse *talanoa* and practices from this too-long ignored region (once referred to as the 'fourth world,' today as the earth's last wilderness). These essays—both rooted and contemporary—offer deeply indigenized readings of scripture and tradition that challenge an overwrought and overindulgent western Christianity, as well as their own Pasifika churches still hobbled by an overbearing missionary legacy.

Like their ancestors—who navigated a vast *moana* with an eye on the constellations and a hand in the water—the 'prophets of the south' represented in this collection are summoning what Bernard Narakobi called 'the wind and the current that can divert the oncoming storm!'"

—Ched Myers, *Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, California, USA*

“The work of the Center of Theological Inquiry on migration and climate change has been enormously enriched by theologians from the world’s liquid Continent, a bellwether of our common future. I commend these communal and prophetic theologies of the Pacific to a global readership.”

—William Storrar, Director of the Center of Theological
Inquiry in Princeton

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Sea of Theologies

Jione Havea

Pasifika (for Pacific Islands, Oceania) coasts in a sea of theologies.¹ In ancient times, our ancestors engaged (sometimes they inspired and sometimes they tricked) local and visiting gods as well as read the winds, the skies, the waves, and the cues of the (is)lands and the underground. Pasifika then was *fale e 'otua* (Tongan: “home of gods”), and “texts” were all around. Texts were on the islands. In the sea. In the sky. In the deep. And even in the dirt (see Vaai, Chap. 2).

Our ancestors navigated the energies (perceived in the phases of the moon and the ebbing of the tides; see Paunga, Chap. 3) that stirred their island homes, and they survived the circles of life along with fellow native creatures. They survived by consuming some of their island companions and taking advantage of their island world, and on some occasions, they lose out or were pushed out. We remember some of the joys and struggles

¹I use “Pasifika” (for Pacific Islands, Pasifika, Oceania) because it flows smoothly on my native tongue. Other names for our region include *Moananui* (see Hoière, Chap. 16) and *Atuvasa* (see Laftaga, Chap. 21).

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of our ancestors in songs and rituals, stories and legends; these “texts” make us belong and remember, reflect and believe, imagine and anticipate.

Later migrants and settlers, from near and far, also brought “texts” which, over time, have interwoven with the local ones. Some of those texts were openly theological and religious, many were sublimely cultural and political, and a few were aggressive and overpowering. Those texts impacted Pasifika people in different ways, and the contributors to this work engage with some of those texts and impacts. In remembering, retelling, and conversing over these texts (which differ from island to island), the following chapters show how Pasifika is *fale talanoa e ‘otua* (home for *talanoa* of gods). Consequently, this collection of essays is also *fale talanoa e ‘otua*.

Pasifika is more than a sea of islands (see Hau’ofa 1994). Pasifika is also the home for a sea of readings (see Havea 2018), and with this collection of essays i² add that Pasifika is home for a sea of theologies as well. I base this new twist on the phrase *fale talanoa e ‘otua* (home for *talanoa* of gods), with three tweaks: First, i borrow the Tuvaluan understanding of the sea as *fale o ika* (home of fish) to assert that “sea” is home (*fale*). The sea is difficult and dangerous (see Talia, Chap. 5), but it is our home. Second, i appeal to the understanding of “sea” as signifier for depth and multitude, the two key qualities of *moana* (deep sea; see Halapua 2010). Pasifika, our home (sea, moana), is deep and rich with native local resources. Pasifika is home for a multitude of, and this is my third tweak, *talanoa e ‘otua* (*talanoa* of gods).³ In these three tweaks, the twitch (tickle, itch) is *talanoa*.

TALANOA

In several (but not all) Pasifika languages “talanoa” refers to three overlapping *events*: story, telling (of stories), and talking (*toktok*, conversation, storyweaving). A story (talanoa, which is usually a mix of stories) dies if there is no one to tell (talanoa) it and if others do not talk (talanoa, as conversation) about it; a telling (talanoa) is dry without a story (talanoa)

²I use the lowercase with the first-person pronoun when “i” am the subject, because i use the lowercase with “you,” “she,” “he,” “it,” “they,” “other,” and so on. All subjects *are* in relation to one another, and i do not see the justice in privileging (by capitalizing) the first-person self.

³*Talanoa e ‘otua* was one of the first Tongan phrases for “theology.” It was abbreviated as *Tala’otua* to mirror, in the reverse, the equation: *theos* (‘otua) + *logos* (tala).

and turns into lecturing or scolding without conversation (talanoa); and a conversation (talanoa) withers without story (talanoa) and telling (talanoa). As conversation (storyweaving), talanoa is ongoing. It extends beyond the three-events of talanoa.

Normal people favor talanoa, but compared to serious dialogues and stern lectures, talanoa is sometimes seen as a waste of time. There is some truth to this view (noting that “noa” in *talanoa* means “no-thing”), especially in the ears of the schedule-driven executives and time-tight academics. But talanoa keeps Pasifika breathing and i borrow it as a stimulus for reading and theologizing (see also Havea 2010, Vaka’uta 2011) for several reasons:

First, talanoa has patience for oral texts to be heard and taken into serious consideration. Oral texts enable remembering and give meanings—similar to the way that written scriptures affect readers—to native and non-native folks alike. Talanoa encourages the scripturalizing of indigenous references (see Uili, Chap. 9).

Second, talanoa breaks social barriers (academics and executives may sit and talanoa with normal people) and allows for stepping into areas where one should not as well as stepping (or tripping) on the toes of others. There is room for disagreement in talanoa, and there are native processes for disagreeing and for seeking pardon—which starts with saying *tulou/turo*’ (see Wiliame, Chap. 20).

Third, talanoa embraces poly- or many-ness. The drive for one-ness (or *onefication*) does not suit the ways that Pasifika natives think and theologize (see Vaai, Chap. 17). The *onefication* drive was enforced by colonialists and missionaries, who robbed the status of women (see Taule’ale’ausumai, Chap. 10) and deceived islanders with dreams of abundance (see Latai, Chap. 11). That drive continues to empower modern Pasifika states (see Fatilua, Chap. 14) and churches (see Pouono, Chap. 12) to pick the pockets of worshippers. Talanoa works against the *onefication* drive by inciting and embracing alternative stories, alternative tellings, and alternative conversations. The twitch in these *alternatives* is “going native.”

Fourth, talanoa stretches the realms of orality. Orality is not just about telling stories (see Prior, Chap. 19) and having a *toktok* (conversation; see Moiwend and MacLeod, Chap. 22). In Pasifika, orality touches all aspects of living—from gardening to marriage ceremonies (see Makewin, Chap. 18), to sailing (see Hoïòre, Chap. 16), to cooking (see Vilitama, Chap. 8), to reading (see Nofoaiga, Chap. 15), to preaching (see Pearson,

Chap. 13), to standing against the state and fighting for liberation (see Moiwend and MacLeod, Chap. 22), and to addressing taboo subjects like sex and suicide (see Havea and Havea, Chap. 23). In the frames of talanoa, art and dance (see Rountree, Chap. 4; Talia, Chap. 5; cf. Tuwera 2010) are expressions of orality, thus registering celebration (see Vidal, Chap. 6) as a fitting frame for theologizing in Pasifika.

One of the gifts of this collection of essays is the presentation of native Pasifika terms as sparks for theological reflection. All essays spotlight this characteristic, thus testifying to the significance of native terms (read: *logos*, language) for the construction of theologies: terms rise within the circles of life; terms live and mutate in the circles of talanoa; terms mean more than what one finds in a language dictionary; terms are more than idioms and rhetoric. In those terms, this collection of essays is an invitation: construct theologies that rise within the circles of life, that can live and mutate, and that can mean more than lexicons, idioms, and rhetoric.

Fifth, talanoa allows (to borrow the postmodern lingo) the authors to die. Stories (talanoa) from the past are remembered and retold (talanoa), and those who *toktok* (talanoa) around those “rememberings” decide whether and how to pass those to future generations. In my case, my parents decided which talanoa to gift me; they made the mistake of also telling me that there were talanoa that i should not receive. I heard the latter as an invitation to dig for those with the help of uncles and aunties (too many to name here). While authors do die, as my parents have, talanoa live on and some talanoa may return from the world of the forgotten to ripple among future generations. Talanoa thus gives birth to alternatives and encourages thinking old things anew (or *a-niu*; see Vaipulu, Chap. 7)—these interests are reflected in all of the essays in this collection.

Talanoa lets the authors die but energizes orators to bring the past, the dead, the forgotten, together with the present (struggles and joys) and the future (anticipations and hopes, *amanaki*), into remembering, and into life. Talanoa is thus a weaving of orality with oratory, and each of the authors in the following chapters sit and stand at that “weave.” When our turn comes and we join the company of dead authors, the weave will remain. And talanoa will continue with future generations of storyweavers.

Talanoa is neither philosophy nor methodology (in the western sense), but native event-and-practice that is rooted deeply in Pasifika.⁴ And in return, Pasifika breathes talanoa. Without talanoa, meanings hide and relations sag. This collection of essays is an example of how talanoa takes place, in writing. Each essay tells several stories that talk to and with each other, seeking to engage readers who have the privilege of deciding what and how to pass these talanoa to future generations. Talanoa requires the presence of others (except for so-called spinners, who talanoa on their own). Without others, talanoa is speechless. And. Time. Stops.

MOANA

Talanoa points to orality and oratory, a key vibe of which is fluidity. In Pasifika, fluidity is not a concept or philosophy but a condition for and a characteristic of living. Pasifika islands are skirted by *moana* (deep sea), and fluidity shapes our mannerisms and cultures as well as links us from different and distant islands. We live in a saltwater world that shapes who we are.

Moana is deep, and it also has power. It is troublesome, and it has also been troubled. Seeing how global warming pushes moana onto the shores of (is)lands, we need to be candid about the troubling powers of moana and (by association) the powers of fluidity, orality, and oratory. Talanoa points to orality and oratory, which point to fluidity, but fluidity is not soft or gentle. As there are powers in moana, so are there powers in orality and oratory (talanoa).

Troubled Waters

The troubling of Pasifika waters did not begin with the naming of and debate over global warming. Nor with the havoc brought by the inappropriately named Pacific War (dubbed the theater of World War II) that foreign empires waged in our waters, or with the Cold War that followed. While the Cold War restricted Europe and its neighbors, and extended across the Atlantic Ocean, our moana on the other side was

⁴Talanoa has been employed in regional peace-building (Solomon Islands) and reconciliation exercises (Fiji), in hermeneutical and theological exercises, and recently appropriated by the United Nations to inspire and mobilize dialogue on climate change. The ripples and rhythms of talanoa are reaching beyond the edges of Pasifika.

blasted with tests of nuclear weapon conducted by the American (1946–62), British (1957–58), and French (1960–96) governments. The toxic radioactive wastes that these noble empires deposited in our “front yards” have very long half-lives, and they will poison many generations into the future. These so-called just war drills devastated our region (see Finau 1975), but the troubling of our waters started even earlier.

We owe a big part of the troubling of Pasifika waters to our “discovery” by European explorers, the most celebrated of whom are Abel Tasman of the Dutch East India Company (1640s) and James Cook of the British Royal Navy (1760s and 1770s). Their expeditions came in the spirit of Pope Alexander VI’s 1493 papal bull *Inter Caetera* (cradle of the Doctrine of Discovery), which sanctioned Catholic empires to *colonize, covert, and enslave* non-Christian (is)lands and peoples.

The European explorers and settlers cleared the way for European law and civilization to enter our waters. They “administered” our sovereign island groups into colonies, and they also infected our people with diseases such as smallpox, typhoid, tuberculosis, measles, influenza, syphilis, and gonorrhea. The Covid-19 pandemic, which entered Pasifika waters through islands still under occupation by foreign colonial powers (the USA, Chile, France, and Indonesia), is a reminder of the diseases that the European law and civilization brought. They registered the (is)lands for their respective crowns, infected native bodies with diseases that had no local remedies, and they colonized the minds of generations to come. The troubling of Pasifika waters goes back to these European endeavors. They came looking for the “new world” and exposed Pasifika to Christian mission boards.

White Christian mission boards followed, tooting a noble aim—to liberate dark people from what they saw as dark ways. They “darkened” the ways of our ancestors. They came to bring light, and they colonized the hearts and faiths of native people. The White missionaries succeeded mainly because Pasifika was already *fale talanoa e ‘otua* (home for talanoa of gods). Pasifika was already familiar with ‘otua (gods), whom the missionaries discredited in favor of the one and only Christian God. The native ‘otua were thus overpowered by Western missionary impositions.

The essays in this collection expose some of the troubles that Western civilization and Christian mission brought to Pasifika waters. But the natives are not free of blame. For instance, if Tupaia of Ra’iatea did not board the *Endeavor* captained by James Cook, the British might not have reached as far as Aotearoa and Australia in those early days; and if “native

missionaries” did not assist the White missionaries, with protection and gifts of sustenance and interpretation, the *papal bull* (read: Doctrine of Discovery) would have been delayed. The following essays, however, are not about shifting the blame or taking the fall. As a collective, the insights of the authors gather in this book to invite talanoa on how theologies in and of Pasifika might shape up in the future.

The theologies currently taught in most of the theological institutions in Pasifika and preached at church functions (cf. Tuwera 1992) played a major role in troubling our waters. The essays in this collection present alternative theologies that are not pinned to the laws and civilizations, creeds and codes of *pālangi* (White, European) explorers and missionaries. This collection seeks, to borrow the words of Bob Marley, to free the theologies in and of Pasifika from mental slavery. But this work is more than simply decolonizing our minds (see also Boseto 1995, Finau 1994); this work is also about decolonizing our hearts from the rip of *pālangi* interests.

VANUA

Moana, in general, is wide and deep. But it is also shallow and narrow in some places—like when it approaches *vanua* (land). Vanua mirrors moana, but in a much smaller scale. Moana and vanua are of different substances and rhythms, but their interconnections are vibrant in Pasifika. The troubling of moana troubles vanua, and vice versa.

In a global scale, the (is)lands of Pasifika are relatively young. And so are the natives, as clusters of people spread across a sea of islands. Pasifika natives are not ancient people, nor the first settlers onto the islands. Native people arrived after the winds and the sun, after the moon and the tides, after the drifts and the bushes, and after many sea- and land-creatures; and we proudly affirm that *our ancestors were navigators*. Our ancestors sailed from somewhere else, from points of departure that are more mythological than historical, and they crossed Pasifika waters and peopled the (is)lands before *pālangi* sails shadowed the edges of moana. When our ancestors navigated moana, they also left lines of connection from island to island, to island ... thus weaving (linking) our sea of islands.

The Fijian word “vanua” also applies to people, culture and tradition, which interweave with land. The struggles and joys of one—land, people, culture, tradition—affect the others. Such interconnection exists in other native terms for vanua—for example, *fenua*, *whenua*, *fonua*, *fanua*,

hanua—and that interconnection is the “weave” that brings the voices in this collection to talanoa. At the background of each essay is that connection—vanua. Vanua is not simply the context (in the western sense), but the weave that holds the theologies in and of Pasifika.

It is important to stress that vanua always already interweaves with moana. The troubling of moana noted in the previous section put vanua under the control of foreign colonial and religious powers. This collection of essays seeks to return the theologies in and of Pasifika to, and under the influence of, the weave of moana and vanua.

The (is)lands of Pasifika are young in comparison to the ancient lands of Indigenous Australia and Africa, but vanua is old. And in a context where age makes a difference, it is appropriate to remember that vanua is much older than the Doctrine of Discovery and the Christian mission. In this regard, one of the drives of this collection of essays is to extend due respect to vanua and moana.

The weave of vanua and moana is the setting in which Pasifika is *fale talanoa e ʻotua* (home for talanoa of gods). This book brings some of the current voices from that home (sea, *fale*) into talanoa, as testimony to Pasifika also being the home for a sea of theologies.

PASIFIKATING

In the 1960s, “coconut theology” encouraged eating and drinking the fruits of vanua as the body and blood of Christ. Wine and bread are foreign to Pasifika, but coconut is a native tree of life (see ‘Amanaki Havea 1987). Coconut theology was more practical than systematic, and we tried various forms of the juice and flesh of the coconut (in many colors—green, yellow, orange, red, brown, and gray); we also tried combinations of taro and kava, breadfruit and pineapple, and so on.

Many in my generation grew up affirming the coconut as a marker of native identity. I felt welcomed when friends and family called me a coconut (and they decided whether i was a good or bad, sweet or rotten coconut). And when i referred to someone as a coconut, it was in solidarity. As natives, we are coconut people. Back then, coconut was as beautiful to us as blackness was to the lover in the Song of Songs (1:5–7).

The perception of coconut changed with migration to White/whitened societies. In the White diaspora, coconut became “brown on the outside but white in the inside”—used as an insult against Pasifika, Asian, Mexican, and Caribbean wo/men who think and act as if they were White. In the

White diaspora, coconut became profane. Over time, owing to remigration and deportation, natives at home also accepted the whitening of the coconut and they too resisted calling/being called coconuts.

Coconut theology affirmed our coconut'ness in the 1960s, when the number of Pasifika migrants were still few. In the case of many island groups (e.g., Rotuma, Niue, Tokelau), there are nowadays more natives in diaspora than at the home(is)land and those in diaspora get a taste of coconut from a can or bottle. The diaspora-born generations see images of coconuts, but they do not know how to listen for falling coconut leaves or fruits.

Sina and Tuna

Pasifika is also home to a sea of talanoa. Each island has talanoa, sometimes in several versions and sometimes different from the talanoa in other islands. One of my favorite talanoa is from Samoa:

Before *Once upon a time*, there was a beautiful *taupou* (daughter of a chief; a virgin) named Sina from the village of Matāvai. Words of her beauty travelled far and captured a young man from another island. He inhaled her beauty and wanted to be with her. Every. Day.

Knowing that Sina goes to the village rock pool to bathe, the young man turned into a *tuna* (eel) and moved into the pool. She learned to not fear him. He curled around Sina when she came to bathe, and they became friends.

As Tuna grew fonder of Sina, she became afraid. Tuna tried to convince Sina to live with him in the pool, but she found his request impossible. His obsession overwhelmed Sina and she stopped coming to the pool.

Depressed by Sina's absence, Tuna sought death. But before he died, he sent a request: he asked Sina to bury his head upon his death; a tree will grow from his head, Sina may feed its fruits to her children. Sina granted his last wish, and a *niu* (coconut) tree grew up from the head of Tuna.

When one husks the fruit of a *niu* one finds the face of Tuna, who surrendered his life for the beloved that he could not seize. (See also Kolia 2020)

The talanoa of Sina and Tuna roots attention at vanua. Niu grew out of love mixed with obsession for something difficult, different, and impractical. The face on the niu is that of Tuna (rather than of a human), a water creature. This Samoan talanoa is not about being empty (as in *coco*,