

RESEARCH ARTICLE

AU: A PASIFIKA UNDERTOW THEOLOGY OF DIPLOMACY

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Abstract

More than half of Pasifika is still colonised. The entire Northern Pasifika is under the Compact of Free Association, making its inhabitants political subjects of the United States of America. Although countries like the Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu, and Tokelau celebrated their independence from Great Britain, they remain dependent territories of Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Maohi Nui, Rapa Nui, Hawaii, Guam, Kanaky, West Papua, Wallis and Futuna, and American Samoa were directly colonised by France, Indonesia, and the USA. This situation creates a structured and controlled diplomacy where Pasifika administrative institutions are puppets.

In Tuvaluan navigational knowledge, undertow currents are referred to as *au*. *Au*, as a verb, refers to two critical realities: firstly, the moving of undertow currents that move opposite to the waves and water on the surface, and secondly, it refers to the impenitent and conscientious shaping of something, like the pruning of tree branches. Combining the two meanings in a navigational space, *au* is a defiant movement to reshape situations. Based on a communal theology of undertow, this chapter aims to reorient Pasifika diplomacy within the community.

Keywords

au/undertow currents, think invertedly, think disruptively, think spirally, diffidence effect

Introduction

The quest for a theology of diplomacy is a much-needed enterprise given the geopolitical struggle of power between the United States of America and its allies, and China, over the Pasifika region. The Blue Pacific 2050 Strategy also provides a compelling environment where all Pasifika stakeholders must contribute to the composition of policies that will guide Pasifika political leaders and policymakers. The Pasifika Church¹ has given little interest in political matters in the region, although the footprints of its political influence can be found in almost every island nation. Robert Audi contended that the separation between the State and Church in the USA is a measure taken to ‘protect religious liberty and government autonomy’ (2011, 39). A taint of Audi’s proposition may be true in Pasifika, but one of the main reasons for the lack of interest in politics within the Pasifika Church is Christian fundamentalism. Pasifika Christians hold to the belief that the reputation of the church will be tarnished if it is to take interest in political matters despite the fact that most Pasifika Christians are politically involved in many democratic processes.

Another reason for the imperative of this undertaking is the fact that most Pasifika Islands are still colonised. Hawaii, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Tokelau, Guåhan, American Samoa, Pitcairn Island, Norfolk Island, Cook Islands, Niue, ‘Uvea and Futuna, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Palau, the Mariana Islands, Rapa Nui, and West Papua, are still colonised. They are either directly colonised or are trust territories of the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand. Oddly, I will add Tuvalu to the list. Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy with the British Crown as its ruler. This effort is also a theological and political nudge for diplomacy to prioritise the political self-determination of the Pasifika nations. But this should begin with the emancipation of the Pasifika populace, for many have gained their political independence but continue to be under the influence of colonial stratagems.

Another important element of this quest is to deal with political ideologies such as the notion of the British Commonwealth. It is an issue worth our attention because being in the British Commonwealth is a testimony of our continuous colonisation, and more so, it is somewhat a confirmation of our ineptitude to self-determine our future in our ways, at our pace, and on our terms. The Commonwealth and other organised institutions are meant to tame and control former colonies, disallowing people in regions like Pasifika to freely traverse the aesthetic of our own wisdom and philosophical wildness.

This paper is an attempt to stir the wildness of Pasifika’s theological prowess using the Kioan undertow understanding of *au* (currents), the unseen force beneath the movement of surface waters. Furthermore, it is a pursuit of a diplomatic narrative from two

1 The generalisation ‘Pasifika Church’ refers to the Christian faith in the region. It does not point to a specific denomination.

separate conceptual starting points: a Kioan au theological reading of politics, diplomacy, and the ebb of socio-economic currents in grassroots communities, and a Kioan socio-economic understanding of intra and inter-communal interaction.

An Essential Theological Shift

The perennial question that led to my interest in the role of theology in diplomacy and politics is, ‘What is the church’s role in the political decolonising of Pasifika?’ In addition to this is the quest for freedom by the people of West Papua (Webb-Gannon 2021, 19), Kanaky (Fisher 2013, 54), Guåhan (Cogan 2008, 34–35) and Hawaii (Trask 1999, 39). They managed to find a voice in the past and they believe in freedom and their customary ownership of resources. Smaller islands like Futuna, ‘Uvea, Tokelau, and Rapa Nui, to name a few, do not have the political capacity to push back against their colonisers. Most certainly, the political decolonisation of these Pasifika lands and bodies is far from the diplomatic priorities of Pasifika political leaders. The economic race to become industrialised has caused the Pasifika leaders to forget their own. Pasifika values like relationality (Vaai 2017, 226) and make right or *ho’oponopono* (Aluli-Meyer 2004, 42–51) have become closed circles confined to new colonial constructs like social and economic equals and acquaintances. It is a pity to see a highly spiritual² people become clones of capitalistic greed at the cost of a brother and sister’s freedom.

Theology on the other hand, most specifically Pasifika theology, needs to take a keen interest in the political affairs of the region. If there is an essential role Pasifika theology can play in regional diplomacy, it is to become the consciousness of the political leaders. Damon Salesa (2023), in speaking of the Samoan case, highlighted the somewhat ambiguous role of Christian spirituality in Samoan society due to the undefined complexity of transitional Samoan spirituality when the *lotu* was brought to Samoa. Salesa (2023, 280–81) wishes that the Samoans could be reoriented by delving deeper into the rich Samoan world of spiritual, ideological, cultural, and social change experienced in the nineteenth century. His concern is valid, given his desire for the swift retrieval of old Samoan ‘ways’. He sees in it the answer to current Samoan and Pasifika predicaments. Salesa’s concern is worth mentioning here because he is not a theologian, and what he wishes for started in the 1960s and 1970s, when the pioneers of Pasifika theology began graduating from the Pacific Theological College and challenging mainstream Western theologies, actioning those theologies by standing with its people in their struggle. The movement of Pasifika theologians and the early contextual Pasifika theologies came to be known as the ‘lifting of the coconut curtain’ in world Christianity (Sachs 2018, 57). The

2 ‘Spiritual’ here defines how Pasifika people treat every aspect of life and occurrences as spirituality. It also refers to Pasifika philosophies, epistemologies, Pasifika cultural identities, and Pasifika cultural patrimonies.

‘lifting of the coconut curtain’ refers to how the Pasifika church came together to fight against France in the Mururoa nuclear protest. The stand for a free nuclear Pasifika by church leaders like John Doom, Setareki Tuiovoni, and Father Walter Lini continues to inspire later generations of church leaders to fight against nuclear testing in the region. Mururoa was one of the incidents that brought the churches together, and an incident where classroom and library theologies came to life and breathed among the people. Such is the necessity of theology in Pasifika regional diplomacy.

Today there has been a theological shift where we begin to take Pasifika philosophy, epistemologies, and hermeneutics seriously and use them as undergirding pillars for theological and biblical interpretations. This is not an adhering to non-theological Pasifika scholars like Salesa, but a complementary undertaking of two important realities: the continuity of pioneering Pasifika theology, for we build on their shoulders and work, and the incapability of transmitted theology to answer current Pasifika socio-economic, political, and theological questions. Pasifika theology has to be interdisciplinary (Vaai 2019, 3). The latter takes into account Salesa’s wise wishes which many Pasifika theologians continue to elude.

The theological shift has also moved into how Pasifika theology can inform Pasifika policies at the highest level. The Pacific Theological College’s recent publication, *The ‘Whole of Life’ Way: Unburying Vakatabu Philosophies and Theologies for Pasifika Development*, is aimed at a readership beyond theological institutions. The book is a Pasifika concoction of disciplinaries with a single commonality, Pasifika philosophies. Our philosophies, our way of living and thinking, are the very spiritualities Salesa and current Pasifika theologians long to retrieve, for they are indispensable to Pasifika theology and life.

Au: An Undertow Theology

Au is the undertow currents that dictate the flow of surface water in the ocean. A learned island child is taught not to swim where there is a *ma’taau* or rip current. *Ma’taau* simply means the ‘eye of the undertow current’. Although children and even adults are discouraged from swimming where there is a *ma’taau*, I will use its negative implications to construct a theology of diplomacy. There are three main components in au theology of diplomacy: first is to think invertedly; second, think disruptively; and third, is to think spirally. To know the au, one must be one with it, think it, and be it. An undertow theology must never be separated from the movement of surface water. The conceptualisation of the au theology through the three components will be unpacked with the hope of finding a narrative as we search for meanings in diplomatic praxis.

Think Invertedly

The au does not normally flow in the same direction as the surface water. The au may flow in the same direction as the surface water, but in most cases, it has a countercurrent flow. Whichever way the au flows, the surface water will not move mistakenly, but according to how the au dictates it. If I am to flank my earlier premise that Pasifika theology should be the consciousness of political leaders in the region, then a Pasifika theology of diplomacy has to be inverting. This is not negation theologising, but by inverting we need to think backwards, or as Vaai (2018) suggests, think ‘upside-down’. According to Vaai (2018), an upside-down view is ‘a position to respond and attack’. Vaai was speaking of a bat-eye view of the cross in interpreting Mark 8:34–38. Fundamentally, a bird-eye-view speaks of a destabilising or overturning conventional systems. Inverting, here, also refers to the refusal to be confined and conformed by dominant and normative diplomacy that is manufactured in high perches and pumped systematically and strategically around the world as a universal standard. It is about the willingness to push back before you discuss matters of regional interest.

There has to be a foundation from which the willingness to refuse derives. Lupematasila Melani Anae gives some admirable suggestions in her critique of Matt Tomlinson’s *God is Samoan*. According to Anae (2023), after much research to understand how Pasifika theologians use the ‘anthropological concepts of culture’ to instigate theological dialogue, Tomlinson fails to capture the destabilising component of theology that would have to disorient anthropology ‘to open up fresh theoretical transformation’ (Anae 2023, 132–33). I will go beyond Anae, not critiquing Tomlinson, but proposing, through inverting thinking, that Pasifika theology is a theology birthed out of two fundamental realities: the issues facing Pasifika, and Pasifika spiritualities that both Anae and Salesa have remarked upon. These two propositions have been the energy of Pasifika theology. The problem then is how, through inverted thinking, can Pasifika theology constantly inform regional diplomacy.

The wisdom of an inverting undertow, au, lies in the fact that the au will return to the same space again, at its own pace. When the au pulls back and the waters recede, we can be assured that the au will either return the same waters or bring new water. And with each recession and advance, the sand beneath shifts, reshaping its form; even the debris carried by each wave is ever-changing. There must be a constant shift in Pasifika-undertowed theology of diplomacy in order for a frequent shaping of regional diplomacy to take place. It is a sign of both Pasifika resiliency, and, more so, of being in active participation with God.

Although there is some resentment about how Pasifika theologians use cultural symbols and thoughts in their work (Palu 2012, 77–79), the Pasifika experience of God

can never be legitimate if it were to be solely based on traditional Puritan theologies such as the *solas* of Martin Luther. Palu's argument against Pasifika theologies is the undermining of the central role of scripture in the whole enterprise. I do not blame Palu, for his critique of Pasifika theology came at a time when Pasifika theologies were still in the contextualising stage.

Furthermore, Pasifika theology has not delved into regional issues to use those issues as the basis for theologising. A recent example is the geopolitical militarisation of the Indo-Pacific driven AUKUS Agreement, a political move that has only strengthened the ongoing colonisation of Pasifika. To theologically refuse confinement or conformity to these Western geopolitical narratives that are discussed behind closed doors of diplomacy, we must begin by turning theology upside-down.

In addition, the approach to reading and interpreting scripture must be overturned if we are to make progress in freeing our people. For example, scripture itself is no longer exactly what the missionaries brought to us since the inception of Christianity in 1668 with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in Guāhan (Kopka 2011, 94). Bernard Narakobi, (1980, 7) in lamenting what seems to be a lost past, stated that it is a fool's task, a lost cause, if we try to reconstruct the exact past. Similarly, for Pasifika theology to continue treating scripture the way it was given to us without critiquing the theologies that came with it, or even the very content of scripture itself, is foolish. The scripture we claim to have enlightened and saved us is the same scripture that was the forerunner to the colonising of our lands and bodies,³ and it has to be viewed in the same way we look at oppressive colonial tools, be it in theory or practice. To neglect this responsibility is to perpetuate the colonial project, only this time we are imposing it upon our people.

Think Disruptively

In my son's classroom was a Social Studies placard with the names and flags of Pasifika States, including Indonesia. The new Year 7 Social Studies textbook was written during the sixteen-year rule of the Voreqe Bainimarama government in Fiji, a time when Fiji was politically courteous to Indonesia at the cost of the ongoing colonisation and genocide of West Papuans (Budiardjo and Liong 1988, 84; Webb-Gannon 2021, 8, 20, 57). When we returned home that day, I quickly explained to my children that Indonesia is not part of Pasifika. I told him about the plight of the West Papuans. I told him how the Government of Netherlands and the Utrechtische Zendingsvereeniging of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands failed the Papuan people they Christianised and colonised. I told them how the United Nations, in 1962, sold the West Papuans to Indonesia in a pact known as the

3 I, like many Pasifika Christians, am always indebted to the work of the missionaries, but that does not mean that my sense of appreciation should prevent me from critiquing Christianity, its mission, and its text.

New York Agreement. There were a lot of things I wanted to tell my children, like how the president of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy, was more worried about the Communist intrusion into Asia than allowing the people of West Papua to be free in their own land. I wanted to tell my children that John F. Kennedy had forgotten how the people of Pasifika saved his life in the waters of Western Solomon Islands in 1943 (Kwai 2017, 27). I told my children that one day they would have to start questioning everything they have learned.

Our Pasifika educational system does not foster an environment for critical thinking. Like their good ancestors when the missionaries and colonisers arrived, our children implicitly trust what they are being taught. The content of their learning is geared to serve the interests of the colonisers—the neo-liberal capitalistic West. Worse, our children are being taught to be intellectually maimed in that they cannot question the authority (not the authenticity, but the authority) of what they learned. Like pebbles, they are shaped and shifted around by the various au of colonial thinking. Marlon Simmons argued that the identities of colonised people are ‘embedded with global overtones, as argued through a sociogenesis that configures the social and material relation of the becoming black life in which they are intertwined’ (2020, 209). If we are to discover ourselves through inverted thinking, where the normative and usual are turned upside-down, we should be ready to be disruptive at any time, and at all times.

An example of disruptive thinking in Pasifika theology is Afereti Uili’s (2023) reference to the biblical figure Abraham as a coloniser and not the eminent father of faith we were taught. Uili called this the curse of Abraham. Uili’s hermeneutical lenses were those of the silent and oppressed Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites. Radically, he equates Abraham to Captain Cook (Uili 2023, 35–62). Such disruptive reading of biblical text might not sit well with many Pasifika Christians. This is evident in the theological density of Christian Zionism in the region that has recently celebrated Israel’s bombing of Palestine. Fraser Macdonald (2024), a senior lecturer in Anthropology at Waikato University, alleged that ‘some of the staunchest support of Israel comes from the Pacific’. Macdonald identified the Pasifika close cultural knit of kinship as one of the main reasons behind the [odd] Christianity practised in the region. He assumed that, ‘In a variety of ways, people [Pasifika people] have woven Jewish people, their sacred geography, and the State of Israel, into their own kinship network’ (Macdonald 2024). For Macdonald, this is one of the best ways of understanding geopolitics in the region.

Macdonald has identified, in a sketch, the surface movement of Pasifika Christianity, and to an extent, I would agree with him. But then there is the messiness of details beneath the complex issue of kinship in the various Pasifika contexts. Geopolitically, many Pasifika Christians care less about the plight of the Kanaky, the Maohi Nui people,

West Papuans, and other colonised Pasifika States. The closest they get to supporting the self-determination cause of these island nations is through prayer.

What then is needed to break the curse of uninterrupted complacency, if we are to ask in a disruptive way? Concepts like rethinking, reimagining, resetting, and redirecting have been around the Pasifika academic hallways for quite some time, but it seems that it has not trickled down to where it should be—the grassroots communities of Pasifika. A lot of the rethinking and reassessing of Pasifika diplomatic relations is done at the government and bureaucratic level. To be disruptive is to educate the voters and the citizens of the islands to understand their plight within the geopolitical and diplomatic schemes of things. Or maybe the rethinking needs to be in ascending order, where our Pasifika governments and bureaucrats need to relearn Pasifika values through unlearning their Western-learned minds. What Western diplomacy has done to the islands is improve their neoliberal capitalistic economies, but Pasifika economies are grounded in island and village economies and values depreciated by the colonial disintegrating of the Pasifika essence of life.

Disruptive thinking from a down-upward undertow current *itulagi* (Vaai 2017, 6) is a constant countercurrent flow of assessing and reassessing current and prevailing issues that affect the people of Pasifika and their lands and oceans. Pasifika diplomacy should always think countercurrently to Western and Eastern diplomacy. To think diplomacy in parallel to Western diplomacy is nothing more than succumbing to or acceding diplomacy, which is a sign of leadership ineptitude and incompetency. It is also a sign of intellectual frailty stemming from fear. Fear diplomacy is seen in the prominence of security in Pasifika diplomatic strategies. Corey Lee Bell (2023) alleges that the security agreements between the governments of Australia, Tuvalu, and Papua New Guinea are somewhat viewed as a diplomatic victory for Australia as the fear of China's economic and political influence in the region grows.

Pasifika's fear diplomacy can be situated in two political domains: the fear of not belonging in the realm of contemporary power-led diplomacy; and the fear of China by the Western traditional diplomatic partners. This can be classified under the established political and diplomatic debate on the polarised stance between security and liberty. Notable is the philosophy of John Locke on governance and security. Locke alleged that there is 'mankind [sic] who are given up to labour and enslaved to the necessity of their mean condition; whose lives are worn out, only in the provision for living' (1959, 228). Locke's claims reverberate with Niccolo Machiavelli's reference to 'unintelligent people' in his political treaty, *The Prince*, a century earlier. This claim by Locke and Machiavelli is central to the donor-aid political and economic diplomacy of Pasifika multilateral partners. The current global economic order makes many, including Pasifika people, economically

insecure thus plunging them into the dependency ditch, and in doing so, they become slaves to donor countries and organisation.

In September 2024, Henrietta McNeill and Maualaivao Maima Koro (2024) asserted that Kiribati and Samoa's refusal to allow a foreign diplomatic presence during their general elections is 'symptomatic of a saturation of absorptive capacity'. To a certain extent, McNeill and Koro are correct if we are to look at diplomacy from a Western *itulagi* and how honestly, we can deal with the colonial donor-aid strategies. The Machiavellian theory contends that the powerless are 'unintelligent people' (Machiavelli 2008, 96) who can be easily manipulated to achieve what you want in any way you want ('the end justifies the means' theory). James B. Atkinson, who translated Machiavelli's treaty, interpreted this to mean that the unintelligent people are 'powerless people, those without the imposing dignity of government' (Machiavelli 2008, 284). McNeill and Koro's (2024) suggestion for partners and foreign governments, which is to focus on absorptive capacity in Pasifika diplomacy if they are to make a difference, depicts a negative representation of Pasifika knowledge systems, cognition, and values as having no specified qualities to frame diplomatic policies that suit the cultures and spiritualities of the islands. McNeill and Koro's (2024) political suspicion that 'visits have only multiplied with geopolitical competition in the region, including the Chinese Foreign Minister's tour of the region in 2022 in pursuit of a (failed) regional security pact' affirms the employment of fear diplomacy that is backed by economic transactions and diplomatic militarisation in the recently signed AUKUS.

In order to disrupt current diplomatic trends, there must be a disruption of our minds first and foremost. A trained and learned mind that is unwilling to be disrupted is a mind that will recolonise our people. The danger here is that, due to our deep spirituality in Pasifika, we will tweak cultural representations and meanings to suit our interests and call it culture. But once we accept the fact that our minds need to be disrupted from their Western training, we take that first step toward self-determination. Political self-determination is one thing, diplomatic self-determination is another. We should never choose security over our liberty. The greatest sign of freedom in diplomacy is refusal. Refusal is disruptive because it tells of our ability to determine our own life and political, economic, and civil plight. It also signifies that we do not need aid and security in militarisation to feel safe. It speaks volumes of the values that undergird our practices and the resilient spirit of Pasifika.

Think Spirally

When heat is lost from the light water near the surface of the subtropic gyre, it balances the density of the various water layers. Wells explains that this causes the

water to slope downward towards the centre of the gyre. The cooling of the waters ... leads to the sinking of the surface water to produce a water mass known as 18°C water. This water, which is removed from the surface layer, will slowly move along the isopycnic layers into the thermocline. As it moves clockwise around the gyre it will be subducted in to the deeper layers of the thermocline in a spiral-like motion. (2009, 511)

Spirals in ocean currents occur because of the balance caused by the mutuality in disparate elements, as defined by Wells. In Pasifika philosophy, this is known as mutual contradiction and is all part of what Vaai called ‘restraint’ (2024a, 32–33). Restraint is not just about holding back; it is also about giving when it is the time to provide. The dynamics of restraint happen in what Tevita Havea calls negotiated spaces (2023, 108–9). In diplomatic spaces, Pasifika leaders should first negotiate within their immediate context. Certain cultural and communal elements need to be considered before a decision is made at the government level. This is not only a gesture of transparency, but it displays the holistic approach to governance and diplomacy.

The fishermen of Kioa know about the spiral-like motion of currents by reading the shift in wind directions, the movement of birds, and the direction of wave movements. They have no idea of scientific hypotheses like those described by Wells (2009). But they know exactly how undertow currents move by reading what goes on the surface of the water—the movement of the *fenua* (land), *moana* (ocean), and *lagi* (sky). In theology, this is the ‘reading of the signs of time’. An important component of reading the signs of time is resolving matters of common interest. Well’s 18°C water hardly happens in Pasifika because the ocean is warmer than the northern ocean. What is experienced in the Southern Hemisphere Ocean is the Ekman spiral which is ‘driven by an imposed wind stress’ (Vallis 2006, 113). The Ekman spiral twists on the surface as the depth of the ocean changes.

Ocean spirals differ depending on where they occur due to oceanic and atmospheric dynamics. Similarly, reading the signs of time as a theological exercise in Pasifika diplomacy should consider the various depths in Pasifika communities and choose whether the spiral moves clockwise or anticlockwise in a wisdom that can only derive from the *fenua*, the *vanua* of Pasifika. We cannot think spirally, as if we live in the Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, or Antarctic Oceans. For too long our thinking in diplomacy has been dominated by Western European and American diplomatic methods learned in the Western schools of international affairs and diplomacy that were meant to gag, stifle and tame us in the first place.

To think spirally is to shift the proceedings that happen on the surface through and by the affairs of the deep, the community. There should be a connection between the

various depths of communal life and how diplomacy is negotiated and administered. The affairs and status of Pasifika communities should dictate the flow of diplomacy. When this is neglected and overlooked, Pasifika governments and diplomats will use a reef current to negotiate in global deep or vice versa, triggering an imbalance that will always put diplomatic navigators at a disadvantage, which continues the colonial neoliberal project while we scramble as beggars. We have to believe in our wisdom and ability to negotiate, whether in adjudication or in hesitation to whatever is offered to us. Vaai (2024b) argues that ‘It is better to eat crumbs while we believe in ourselves than to eat a full meal from the master’s kitchen’.

Conclusion: The Difffluence Effect

The aim of thinking invertedly, disruptively, and spirally is to hearten Pasifika diplomacy through difffluence. Difffluence in meteorological terms refers to air that moves outward from the centre. The au undertow theology of diplomacy encourages the capacity to rise and walk away from the negotiating table when our demands are not met. One of the heartbroken and miserable representations of Pasifika diplomacy can be seen in the recent COP (Conference of the Parties) held in Baku, Azerbaijan. Negotiators from AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) and LDCs (Least Developed Countries) threatened to walk out of the negotiation because they felt like they were not heard (Schuster 2024). *The Guardian* further stated that the effort to battle climate change should be a collective one as agreed to in the 2015 Paris Agreement (Schuster 2024). Nine years later and after nine COPs, nothing is materialising and Pasifika continues to pound on the Loss and Damage Fund that is controlled by the same nations that perpetuate ecological violence in the name of development.

The question is, ‘When can Pasifika negotiators walk away from the table and say enough is enough?’ In matters vital to life, wisdom often lies in the ability to walk away. Difffluence is not a weakness. It is our strength to affirmatively state that we have wisdom that has existed for thousands of years, which we can rely on to fight issues concerning Pasifika. The artifacts found in archaeological sites from Papua New Guinea to Tonga date back three thousand years (Allen 1996, 11). Ward Goodenough (1996, 4) alleged that the central islands were settled around 1500 BC. Pasifika needs to dig deep within themselves to plot and pave a way forward in diplomacy. If I am to speak in a language that many, if not all, Pasifikans understand, we need to be the navigators we once were. We have lost the diplomacy plot—to sail across the ocean and exchange gifts, seek help in warfare, and negotiate marriage courtships (Lal and Fortune 2000, 549) which is thousands of years of diplomacy. These tales can be found in our songs and metaphors. We must use them as

diplomatic instruments to negotiate and, if things do not work out, walk away. There is always another tide, another wave, and the undertow currents will change the features of surface movement again.

The diffidence effect is taking control and determining our fate. Diplomacy is not just about negotiating our positions in an ocean of differences and diverse human behaviours and intentions; it is also about agreeing that our differences cannot be solved by giving up our uniqueness. It has nothing to do with pride and identity, it is about life. Moving away is moving forward. To linger at the coloniser's table is to be in debt and that is exactly where we are at the moment. Spoon-fed by aids, we have become numb in our ability to construct and create, to dream and visualise what is it like to reach the fenua after sailing the stormy seas. Epli Hau'ofa's (2008) *We Are the Ocean* is similar to Ilaitia Tuwera's *Vanua*. (2023). They speak of who we are as people of the vanua, moana, and lagi. Most probably, who we are is best described by Teresia Teaiwa who claims that 'we sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood' (2021). Like the ocean and its currents, we are people of fluidity and should never be stagnant in our dealings and thinking, whether it be theologically or diplomatically. Like the ocean, we should not remain calm and pretend that all is well. At times, the call to diplomacy emerges like a surging wave amid a dark and turbulent ocean, with the undertow currents moving ferociously beneath the surface, preparing for a fine day at dawn.

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