

Pasifika Collective Well-Being During the COVID-19 Crisis: Samoans and Tongans in Brisbane

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Abstract

This paper gives insights into the collective ways that Samoans and Tongans living in Brisbane have responded to the changes and uncertainties of the COVID-19 era. As Samoan and Tongan insider researchers, we present observations and dialogue from Samoan and Tongan families that were recorded during March 2020, as part of an inquiry into Pasifika mobilities and well-being in Australia. The responses drawn from these cohorts suggest an established resilience and purposed creativity during this global crisis. The social distancing regulations, border closures and travel bans have caused Samoan and Tongan communities in Brisbane to engage more; particularly connecting through digital spaces (*vā*) of social media and other online communication platforms. Pasifika have responded to the pressures and parameters of a pandemic with innovative ways of nurturing their collective well-being.

Introduction

The COVID-19¹ worldwide pandemic triggered changes to traditional ways of living, for Samoans and Tongans in Brisbane. The collective well-being of these two *Pasifika*² groups were particularly affected by the social restrictions and travel bans implemented in Australia and across the Pacific. However, despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the digital *vā* has allowed this cohort to remain connected to their family and friends. Through the digital *vā*³ these groups have been able to continue their collective way of being. This paper will present a selection of observations and dialogue recorded in Brisbane, Australia, during March

¹ The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020a:1) initially referred to the unknown pneumonia cases recorded in Wuhan, China as ‘Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)’ and a month later began to use the official term ‘COVID-19’ (WHO, 2020b:1).

² ‘Pasifika’ is a term used by Pacific Islanders as a pan-Pacific Islander identity shared by community groups living in transnational contexts, particularly in Australia and New Zealand (McGavin, 2014:128, 134; Mila-Schaaf, 2010:22-23).

³ ‘*Vā*’ is a concept that means similar things to both Samoans and Tongans. It denotes a social space that exists between people; a relationship that is both socially and culturally significant to their way of life.

2020.⁴ As insider researchers, we aim to share the challenges faced by Pasifika communities, as well as their countered measures of integrated resilience and collaborative creativity during this global crisis.

It is important to acknowledge the influx of Samoan and Tongan people into Brisbane has also meant the arrival of their culture. This cohort did not forsake their island ways upon migration to Australia, instead, they have used it to navigate their place in a new country (Enari, 2019; Enari & Matapo, 2020). Pasifika academic and poet Karlo Mila-Schaff (2010) has labelled Tongan and Samoan diasporic settlement as a re-territorialising of the island homeland where they continue interconnected collective ways of living. For this reason, Samoan and Tongan well-being experiences during COVID-19 are better understood through their worldviews of *fa'a-Sāmoa* (the Samoan way) and *anga faka-Tonga* (the Tongan way) (Enari & Fa'aea, 2020). These two frameworks are similar in how they prioritise relationships in their daily living (Gershon, 2012; Taumoefolau, 2013). According to Pasifika well-being author Cabrini 'Ofa Makasiale (2013), relationships with God (spirituality) and with others (communality) are important aspects of life for Samoan and Tongan people living in diaspora contexts (Ihara & Vakalahi, 2011). Although Samoan and Tongan people have migrated away from their homelands to Pacific Rim countries like Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, they will repeatedly return to previous locations to maintain socio-cultural linkages (Barcham, 2009). Evidence of this solidarity in migration and settlement in Brisbane was recorded in narratives and surveys collected during 2015-2018 (Faleolo, 2020b, p.103):

Familial and community interactions are important factors in[...]decision-making when Pasifika trans-Tasman migrants plan a move from Auckland to Brisbane. The ability to stay connected to both nuclear and extended family, as well as attend a place of worship are as important if not more so, than the proximity to employment opportunities. Familial/social connection points are significant in providing sustenance for Pasifika individuals.

Samoan social geographer Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009) asserts that *fa'a-Sāmoa* is demonstrated through the investments made by Samoans who migrate abroad to progress and extend familial status and connections.

Each member has roles and responsibilities to fulfill. Tautua (service) still requires that one's resources be placed at the disposal of the family, including 'intelligence' from formal education and 'strength' derived from wage and salaried labor (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2004:264). The themes that emerge from [...] stories about movement and

⁴ Observations and dialogue of Tongans living in Brisbane presented in this paper, have been drawn from participant-observation fieldwork conducted by Faleolo, as part of an ongoing larger study of Pacific mobilities in Australia, undertaken as part of her postdoctoral research (2020-2022). Refer to author notes for project details.

mutual support focus on caring relationships and describe more than the pursuit of wealth for wealth's sake. [...] Moving for them is about self-determination as the 'aiga take advantage of opportunity. In their terms, taking the risk of going to New Zealand or America is part of fa'a-Samoa. (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2004, p. 271)

The development of socio-cultural wealth, through migration, has been recorded in a recent study of younger and older Samoans who are maintaining their identity as 'Samoan' and continuing to practice fa'a-Sāmoa as a way of supporting their communities in the contexts of Australia and New Zealand (Enari, 2019). Similarly, Tongan cultural anthropologist Tevita Ka'ili (2017) states that the migration of Tongans is a collective movement that provides support for those who remain as well as opportunities for others to follow. Samoans and Tongans choose to participate in circulatory mobility because of an innate desire to help progress their collectives (Faleolo, 2020b).

Therefore, the ability to move freely between diaspora communities and island homelands is important to the way of life led by Samoans and Tongans based in Brisbane (Faleolo, 2019). The to-and-fro movements of Samoan and Tongan people between diaspora communities and their homelands is part and parcel of their *tausi le vā* (Samoan for maintaining social spaces) or *tauhi vā* (Tongan for maintaining social spaces) processes of reciprocal maintenance of relationships (Ka'ili, 2008 & 2017; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). Similarly, the regular visits and gathering of groups within Brisbane or overseas allows for important face-to-face *talanoa* (talking, communicating, storying) that builds and nurtures social spaces (Halapua 2007; Vaioleti 2006).

Samoans and Tongans, across their transnational spaces, have sought to overcome the distances and boundaries that come with COVID-19 regulations. The following sections will present observed Samoan and Tongan experiences in Brisbane that indicate the determination to stay connected to one another. Pasifika academics have labelled this new form of social and cultural engagement as the digital vā, where the reciprocal maintenance of relationships still applies through the internet (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Tielu, 2016).

The Australian federal regulatory announcements, beginning in March 2020, created widespread apprehension across the country. In Queensland, after enduring several months and consecutive years of extreme natural events, the encroaching COVID-19 pandemic was met with some grim seriousness. The fluctuating dynamics of Brisbane-based Samoan and Tongan daily lives were again tested by an increasing uncertainty about their future collective well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic social restrictions exacerbated already dire situations for some Australian-based Pasifika, at the time of observations (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020). The

prevailing economic recession (Shukla, 2020); ongoing legal, health, housing and educational issues related to inequitable access to resources and social support (Aust. Gov. Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2018; Rose-Redwood et al., 2020; United Nations, 2020); psychological trauma (Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2020) linked to seasonal events: cyclones, floods, drought and bush fires in Australia (2017-2020); continuing discrimination of Pasifika peoples in Australia (Durham et al., 2019); and growing anxiety over not knowing how other overseas family members are faring (Craig et al., 2020), particularly their elderly (Nanda et al., 2020); these are all current concerns for most Samoans and Tongans living in Brisbane that have been heightened by the unprecedented global phenomena (Shukla, 2020).

Methodology

As Samoan and Tongan insider researchers, we present observations and dialogue from Samoan and Tongan families that were recorded during March 2020, as part of an inquiry into Pasifika mobilities and well-being in Australia. Our physical observations were undertaken as participants during Samoan/Tongan community activities within Central Brisbane, Ipswich, Logan, and Northern suburbs. The range of activities/events observed, took place in a range of contexts, such as business meetings, educational contexts, religious forums and sporting or recreational settings.

Our initial observations and conversations were focused on understanding how social regulations introduced in the month of March affected the well-being of our communities. As we became more aware of the online strategies used by our informants to nurture and maintain their collective well-being, we further inquired using *e-talanoa* with these particular groups. E-talanoa is a concept coined by Faleolo (2016; 2019; 2020b) referring to ongoing dialogue, sharing of ideas, and storying experiences using online forums while maintaining important Pasifika protocols and understandings of *vā*. Our connections as co-authors (Figure 1) as well as with our informants (Figure 2) were increasingly maintained through digital *vā* (Enari & Matapo, 2020) by continual e-talanoa (Faleolo 2020a).



Figure 1: Authors use e-talanoa to unpack findings from their community e-talanoa

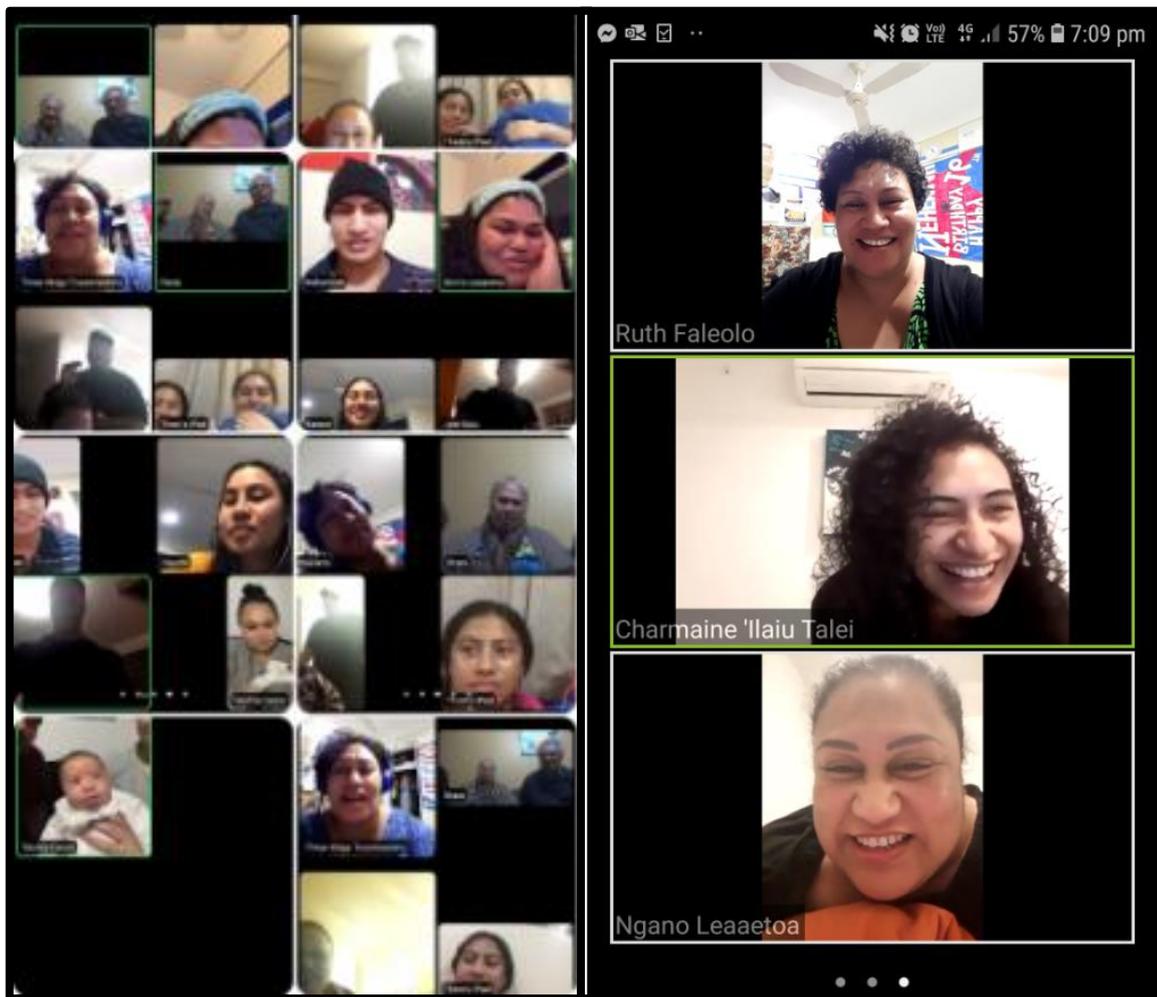


Figure 2: Establishing a digital vā with Pasifika collectives during COVID-19

Both these Pacific approaches have developed from deep cultural knowledge and values that are embedded in our research practice. The significance of maintaining vā is foundational to engaging in talanoa. In the same vein, prior to having effective e-talanoa focused on the research work, we took the time to establish positive digital vā through building the relationship

first (e.g. introducing ourselves, making genealogical connections, building socio-cultural links, finding common ground or relatable experiences). Further to this, online connections evidently became progressively more vital to the Samoan and Tongan communities as the social and travel restrictions increased within Australia. These important experiences are outlined in the following sections, highlighting the significance of Pasifika solidarity during the pandemic.

Samoan Experiences in Brisbane

The COVID-19 worldwide pandemic has not only led to changes in Australia but has also affected the collective well-being of Samoans residing in Brisbane. The March 12th Federal Government ban of gatherings with more than 500 people directly impacted Samoan people in Brisbane. Because of the communal nature of this group (Enari, 2019), many regularly engage in events that exceed 500 people such as church activities, cultural celebrations, and family reunions (Gershon, 2012). The added isolation caused by the Australian border closure has further disrupted this community and their way of life (Aust. Gov. Dept. of Home Affairs, 2020). It is the first time this cohort has been physically disconnected from the global world. The border closures have meant they were unable to visit their relatives in other countries, including the homeland Samoa. Many Samoan cultural ceremonies in the islands have been postponed because of the inability of diasporic Samoans to travel and participate (Aust. Gov. Dept. of Home Affairs, 2020; Craig et al., 2020; Salcedo et al., 2020). For example, a Samoan chiefly ceremony in Samoa had been cancelled because the recipients from Brisbane were unable to attend. Other occasions such as weddings, birthdays and memorials have either been cancelled or postponed in Samoa because of the travel restrictions and inability of overseas families to attend (Salcedo et al., 2020). One Samoan lady who resides in Brisbane, voiced her frustration of not being able to travel during an e-talanoa:

It has been very hard for me because my parents are buried in Samoa. I normally save my money in Brisbane to go and see my parents who passed away and my family in Samoa who still live there. That is such a special time for me. But now for the first time in my life I can't go and hug my cousins and touch my parent's headstones.

Even within Australia many Samoan people were unable to visit each other because of the state border restrictions.

Furthermore, on March 22, 2020 the Prime Minister's announcement on the closure of non-essential indoor venues and non-essential services including pubs, clubs and restaurants financially affected the Brisbane Samoan community. Many of this cohort are employed in the

hospitality industry within restaurants. Sadly, those who were not Australian citizens were ineligible to claim benefit payments (Durham et al., 2019; Faleolo, 2019). This resulted in some moving back to New Zealand and Samoa. The rapid nature of COVID-19 restrictions and employment layoffs meant for some (International Labour Organization, 2020), the only way they could survive was to leave Australia. The task of suddenly relocating and looking for work in another country was made increasingly difficult during a global pandemic (Craig et al., 2020).

The rise in unemployment among Samoan people in Brisbane not only caused financial difficulty for this group and their immediate family but also their extended relatives who reside internationally (Shukla, 2020). Some of their relatives overseas depend on the remittances they receive from their Brisbane family (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). Despite the financial and logistical challenges that were faced by Samoan people in Brisbane during COVID-19, there were also those who were able to use the isolation period to spend more time with their families. Some Samoans had labelled the COVID-19 period a time to “disengage to re-engage” and many within the community saw the COVID-19 isolation period as an opportune time to interact more with their family.

An increased presence of family members in the home meant an increase in youth learning cultural knowledge such as language, performances, and village legends. Many of the youth in particular have called the COVID-19 restrictions “a blessing” as they believed they “wouldn’t have gained as much cultural knowledge from [their] parents if it weren’t” for the isolation restrictions. The intergenerational make up of Samoan households in Brisbane, with some having as many as four generations in one house meant Samoan oratory skills were being passed down. COVID-19 offered a rich cultural experience within families: oratory shared from great grandparents, who were alive during Samoa’s independence to second-generation Australian-born great grandchildren. A Samoan grandparent spoke of her time with her grandchildren during COVID-19:

This has to be the only time my grandkids have been at home long enough for me to be able to teach them more about our Samoan language and culture. We have had the best time together and I know what I teach them is more valuable than what they learn at school. I am teaching them about who they are as Samoans and our connection back to our village.

The isolation restrictions meant not only were people interacting more with family members in their household but also with other family members around the world through the digital *vā* (Enari & Matapo, 2020). This period has resulted in the strengthening of familial

ties, not only with family members in the home, but across the world (Enari & Matapo, 2020). In essence, Samoan people in Brisbane were actually not social distancing but in fact socially interacting at a physical distance.

Tongan Experiences in Brisbane

The COVID-19 worldwide pandemic has led to changes in Australia that have impacted the collective well-being of Tongans residing in Brisbane. Restrictions introduced in March 2020 have meant that the norms of traditional events and socio-cultural gatherings were either postponed, cancelled, or rescheduled as virtual meetings (online). On March 12th, the Federal Government banned gatherings of more than 500 people. For one Tongan family, a wedding scheduled to take place in Australia had to be postponed till 2021 because of the absolute number of people expected to attend the occasion, exceeding the limit. This threshold coupled with an overseas travel ban⁵ made customary festivities, involving extended families, near impossible. The groom-to-be of a Tongan family based in Auckland, Brisbane and Sydney shared his frustrations online using the Private Messenger chat forum (e-talanoa):

We were a bit sad that we couldn't have everyone come to our wedding this year. We both agree that it is important to have our relatives and friends join us, so we're going to wait till next year. It just doesn't seem right to get married without our loved ones, although there is the option to do it straight away at the office or with our pastor on our own, it just isn't right. We know that our mothers have planned to do things involving our traditional customs and this is important to us as much as it is to our extended families. We have to wait till we can do a big traditional wedding because the government regulations are so strict about the numbers that can attend our wedding. Plus it's a bit risky having all those people in one place, especially with the coronavirus going around. Yeah, not really worth the risk eh?

The travel ban in Australia created further distance between Tongans in Brisbane and those living abroad (Aust. Gov. Dept. of Home Affairs, 2020; Salcedo et al., 2020; Shukla, 2020). For many Tongans who have migrated to Australia, the majority of their *famili*⁶ still reside in either New Zealand or Tonga. So, it is common practice for members of *famili* Tonga to maintain important socio-cultural connections by making regular trips 'back home' to New Zealand and their islands. For most second-generation and third-generation Tongans in Brisbane, a key reason for these annual trips is to "visit loved ones" and to "check-in on the folks back home." Therefore, the uncertainty around travel restrictions created anxiety amongst

⁵ Another announcement made on March 12th, 2020 by the Federal Government was that Australian residents should no longer travel overseas unless it was essential.

⁶ *Famili* is a Tongan term used widely to refer to family, inclusive of nuclear and extended family members/groups.

Tongans “feeling stuck” in Brisbane. Several Tongans spoke of their concern for the safety of famili living abroad⁷ (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020; Shukla, 2020) and whether the daily needs of their elderly parents, living abroad, were being met and a genuine concern for their safety from the COVID-19 virus (Nanda et al., 2020). For many of them, online forums such as Facebook, Messenger and Zoom became the main connection point for their famili during this time.

The tightening of social distancing regulations has prompted the increase in online connections between Tongans. These important online relationships became particularly important when the Queensland State Government announced full lockdown measures⁸ (ABC News, 2020; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2020). At first, online discussions ensued informally amongst famili. These online connections quickly led to more organised networks; including the various live church coffee chat sessions, the ‘pass the *kiekie*⁹ challenge’ and other Tik Tok transformation challenges. The closure of churches and other community spaces was an impetus to further utilise enmasse available technology and social media forums. There was an increased use of Messenger or Zoom video conferencing and face-time meetings for e-talanoa between Tongan youth groups, Tongan sport club members, Tongan academics, and famili members. In essence, ‘virtual villages’ that had existed prior to COVID-19 for Tongans further developed and flourished as a result of the physical social regulations introduced across the globe at this time.

The development of new business ventures and creative forms of income for many Tongans has benefited from the growing online presence of both younger and older generations of Tongans. On March 23rd, the closure of non-essential services and venues in Queensland meant that many residents, including Tongans, were left without work. One woman living in Brisbane shared her story during a Zoom (e-talanoa):

We all felt the pressure when we were told to stay home from work. Not long after the lockdowns happened our company lost a lot of its contracts. When we got to go back to work, some of us were asked to see the boss and we kind of knew that we might be getting laid off. I was one of them. I was just glad that I had applied quickly for another position and got it because I got laid off on Thursday one week, and I accepted a new job the following Tuesday. It is a computer-based job working from home, so I am home with the kids now since the schools are closed. With my new job, I have been able to keep our rent paid and still send some money to New Zealand to help them out.

⁷The World Health Organisation (WHO) declares a ‘public health emergency of international concern’.

⁸ Queensland’s premier responded to advice from the Chief Health Officer in response the spread of COVID-19 cases in the state, Updated 25/6/20. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-28/coronavirus-timeline-queensland-tracking-spread/12077602?nw=0> (accessed on 27 June 2020).

⁹ Kiekie are traditional crafts designed to be worn by women around the waist, as a cultural form of respect.

I can't imagine what might have happened if I didn't act on time to get myself hooked up in alternative employment.

Furthermore, the Queensland Premier closed the state borders two days later. The impact of these closures and restrictions on Tongans based in Brisbane, yet working in other parts of Australia, heightened financial pressures. However, the already well-established online communities now served as a new way of trade for the online sale of Tongan goods and crafts; particularly *kiekie* and *ta'ovala* (fine mats worn around the waist), and popular dishes such as *pai faina* (pineapple pie). Furthermore, despite some concerns about physical inactivity related to social networking (Leigh-Jones & Moore, 2012) and physical lockdowns at home, many Pasifika, including Tongans, had engaged in live video activities like 'The Good Start Program' helping to promote healthier lifestyles (home-based exercise routines, healthy alternative cooking tips during lockdown, etc.) without the added expenses of going to the gym or to order the usual fast foods. One woman found the Good Start Program to be a good distraction from the negative media focused on the pandemic. She found talking to her community members on Facebook about how best to spend time during lockdowns to be life-changing:

My son introduced me to his friends at uni. These students have set up a good online health program, I think it's called the Good Start? oh, yes that's it, the Good Start Program. I joined them for their cooking classes and for their evening workout routines. It's a good way to stay connected to the young ones out there who are doing a good thing for our community during this time. I have been able to work my way back into an exercise routine that I can do at home. Don't really need to pay for those expensive gyms when you know how to safely exercise in your own backyard. I feel better for it too. I told others in my family to give it a go. My daughters have gotten into a regular workout together using another online exercise program. But I enjoy my Good Start Program because its Pacific Islanders talking to you and they know us Pacific bodies better than others lol.

Another significant development within the Brisbane Tongan community occurred during the long months of COVID-19 social distancing. The timely launch of Brisbane's Pasifika TV and Radio provided an important platform "to share the music, news, culture language and stories of ...Tongan people" (Layt, 2020b). As Faleolo (2020c) explains, the physical and social restrictions were felt by the Tongan collectives, but it was also a catalyst for the increased use of online forums for intergenerational connections. During March 2020 several famili Tonga collectives transitioned from a reliance on gathering within physical spaces to utilising available virtual spaces like Facebook, Skype, Private Messenger Chat, and Zoom. These online forums used for e-talanoa influenced the way churches and other community groups met

and communicated. Tongan communities have fostered new ways of promoting their collective well-being, beyond the travel bans and despite the social restrictions imposed upon them.

Discussion

The Samoan and Tongan groups observed do not conform to universal notions of individualism, as their lives are founded on collective cultural values that esteem communal solidarity (Faleolo, 2016 & 2020b; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2004; Taumoefolau, 2013). It is the fact that our Pasifika people are interdependent that intrigues us as researchers to look closely at how they have responded to the social regulations implemented during COVID-19. Our observations and ongoing communication with respective Samoan/Tongan groups show that their collective well-being has been affected (Enari & Fa'aea, 2020). More specifically, the rules and regulations have fundamentally disrupted the inability to physically gather with their family, church, and community groups. Typically, Samoans and Tongans see themselves as part of a wider network (Gershon, 2012; Taumoefolau, 2013); the Samoan term '*āiga potopoto*' refers to the extended family or circle to which one belongs. Similarly, the Tongan term for this communal concept is *kāinga*. When one member of this collective is affected, they are all affected. For example, the pain of bereavement or loss of employment by one, is felt by the whole group.

In these situations, Pasifika people would give openly with disregard for the length of time or financial resources spent (Faleolo, 2019; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). Many would travel far distances to be physically close and to serve their family; funeral preparations, week-long mourning, buying extra groceries and providing after hours child-care are normal forms of support that are rendered to others during times of need. It is this innate desire to provide physical acts of solidarity that has been challenged by the restrictions and bans instituted in Australia, further impacting vital forms of sustenance for the collective good and well-being of Samoans and Tongans.

Not only have the physical restrictions in Brisbane affected the socio-cultural aspects of Samoan and Tongan collective well-being, but also other spheres of holistic happiness, including spiritual, mental, emotional, environmental as well as economic aspects of a 'good and happy' life (Faleolo, 2020b: 220). As outlined above, a range of events and activities came to a halt in March 2020, causing job loss, financial stress, school, and campus closures, as well as cancellation or uncertainty around scheduled family or community events. The holistic nature of collective well-being for Samoan and Tongan people means that when one area of their well-being is affected, it has a ripple-effect on other areas of their collective well-being.

However, despite the negative (in)direct impacts of the pandemic felt by Samoans and Tongans living in Brisbane, there is evident resilience within our communities. Our Pacific world perspectives, as Samoan and Tongan people living in Australia, draws upon our deeply-embedded socio-cultural values and faith. Fa'a-Sāmoa and anga faka-Tonga are based on shared understandings that when problems arise, the collective will transcend these obstacles through their spirituality and communality (Ihara & Vakalahi, 2011; Makasiale 2013). These are evident in the resilient ways that Samoan and Tongan people have adapted their forms of community, connection and knowledge-passing beyond the parameters and dynamics arising from the COVID-19 regulations. The benefits of building and maintaining online connections that nurture holistic well-being are possible solutions for non-Pasifika groups struggling with increasing social isolation during the pandemic crisis.

Modern technology and the digital space has helped collapse communication barriers and increased interconnectivity among these communities. Many of these people are more connected than ever before: locally, nationally, and internationally. Ongoing e-talanoa within global Tongan collectives has maintained intergenerational connections that are key to their shared well-being (Faleolo, 2020c). Interestingly, this group does not passively engage in the digital space, instead, they indigenise these western forms of technology (Tielu, 2016). They have used the digital space for Pasifika language teaching (Wilson, 2017), Pasifika cultural knowledge exchange (Enari & Matapo, 2020) and e-talanoa (Faleolo, 2020a, 2020b & 2020c). What these groups have done in essence is (re)drawn the digital space to reflect their own Pasifika realities and journeys (Franklin, 2003). The digital vā has helped connect Samoans and Tongans in Brisbane to their families and friends, across the globe. On another note, members in both the Samoan and Tongan communities have decidedly used the isolation period to cull activities that usually deduct quality time with loved ones and to re-prioritise their home life and health. In response to the COVID-19 regulations, Pasifika people have improved both the quality and quantity of time spent with their households, and more than ever, interchangeably engaged with each other both face-to-face (when and where regulations permit) and via the digital vā (Enari & Matapo, 2020).

Conclusion

As communal people, both the Samoans and Tongans observed in Brisbane have felt the impacts of COVID-19 not only in Australia, but also across the diaspora and their island homelands. The very nature of familial collectives and community networks that span across multi-locations is that one member or part will feel the pain/loss/burden of another member or

part. The collective nature of Samoans and Tongans is, however, the main reason our families and communities can progress, resolve, and create new opportunities borne from shared hardships. The social distancing regulations, border closures and travel bans have caused our communities to increasingly re-engage in the digital spaces that are easily accessible across multi-sited familial networks. Although social regulations and border closures disallowed Samoans and Tongans to meet as large groups, they continued to gather through the digital vā. The global challenges of COVID-19 have provided an impetus for building online forms of socio-cultural connections that will help to sustain and nurture physical vā between intergenerational family and community members. It is envisioned that post-COVID-19 life for Pasifika collectives will continue to navigate the digital vā and enhance the interactions that will occur within physical spaces in the community, including the increased use of technology in churches, businesses and family homes to provide more effective and engaging communication and knowledge-sharing.

In closing, this discussion has presented valuable insights into how Pasifika collective cultures have contributed to more sustainable communities, during COVID-19. Future pandemic initiatives should consider how the well-being of peoples from collective cultures will be affected by social distancing measures. Also, both federal and state governments should take note of how these existing familial and communal networks can provide more effective platforms for conveying important information across multi-sited, intergenerational groups, while maintaining their cultural protocols and preferred languages. Despite the very recent COVID-19 trials faced, and after dealing with a host of disadvantages, adjustments and overcoming challenges to migrate, live and work in Australia, fa‘a-Sāmoa and anga faka-Tonga even now endures. Not only do these worldviews survive, but they also thrive among its people and are foundational to the holistic well-being of Samoan and Tongan communities in Brisbane. It is our humble prayer that those who engage with us will also acknowledge the importance of our cultural frameworks and collective communities. *(Al)ofa atu.*

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