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Shaping Pacific Islander Identities in the Diaspora:
Using E-Talanoa to Strengthen Transnational Ties

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Abstract

Pacific Islanders have engaged in transnationalism since the time of their early voyages. Ancient wayfinders first learned to read the stars and swells to cross the ocean for a myriad of reasons: trade, opportunity, education, adventure, and more. Today, our borders have stretched beyond those of the Pacific Ocean, from the far reaches of Australia to the corners of Alaska, and yet we still maintain these transnational bonds with our ethnic homelands. One such way we foster these ties and build cultural competency is through *talanoa*.

*Talanoa*, a pan-Pacific speech genre, is more than just a form of communication. It is a sacred space of *noa*, a place of equilibrium, where all participants can engage in heartfelt connection and conversation. Known for being a solutions oriented conversation, it is a traditional practice used by various Pacific Island cultures from discussing everyday topics to having more nuanced conversations about society, politics, and religion. For Pasifika people in the diaspora, the ability to witness and participate in *talanoa* and their various forms strengthens our transnational ties with our ethnic homelands. In recent decades, with the advent of advanced technology, physical distances have been bridged to some extent by the internet and social networking sites. The same can be said for *talanoa* and the emergence of *e-talanoa*. As *talanoa* transition into the digital realm, this cultural classroom has become even more accessible, particularly for those in the diaspora who are further removed and estranged from our communities.

Although *e-talanoa* is far from perfect, as it becomes more available, its use and application can be further broadened to bring those in the diaspora into the fold of their island communities and the Oceania community as a whole. By analyzing and participating in various forms of *talanoa*, its usefulness as a cultural classroom can be explored. Going even further,
e-talanoa, as it continues to develop and become available, may be an ideal means to reach and educate diasporic Pacific Islanders, allowing them to strengthen their unique sense of identity.

Key Words: Talanoa, E-talanoa, Pacific Islanders, Pasifika, Diaspora, Identity
Introduction

“In my culture—“

“You mean OUR culture!”

Growing up, I remember repeating this exchange with my mother almost as if it were a call and response. Years into adulthood, she finally uses “our” when referring to our Tongan heritage. Perhaps it seems like an insignificant thing to get caught up on, but when you spend your life estranged from your community and walk around feeling like an invisible minority, this use of “our” bears a heavy weight.

Today, I am proud of my upbringing and grateful for the lessons I was afforded while being raised in a multicultural society. My mother was born and raised in the Kingdom of Tonga; I, however, grew up in the “Sun City” of El Paso, TX, well over 5,000 miles away. The border cities between the United States and Mexico have so much to offer regarding culture, education, and opportunity. However, in the ways they allowed me to experience culture in new and in-depth ways, they were not practices rooted in a heritage I could call my own. Being a large metropolitan city, El Paso is a hub of cultural diversity—unfortunately, the amount of Pacific Islanders are wanting, with almost no community to speak of, especially a Tongan one. In the 2020 United States Census El Paso recorded a population of 678,815 people. Among this populace 551,513 are reported to be Hispanic or Latino, 25,077 are Black or African American, 10,347 are Asian, and only 1,514 are Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. This equated to me growing up feeling like a guest in other people's cultures. Over time, I celebrated with friends and peers as they grew into their own people and celebrated their milestones within their

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cultural communities. Still, I often longed to do the same with my own. Later in life would come the time for me to participate in my cultural practices, but they would take shape in unexpected forms.

Being diasporic\(^3\) is not unique to Pacific Islanders; in a globalized world, many different cultures have uprooted themselves and moved across the world, establishing cultural enclaves. Though not unique, it does make the overall sentiment applicable to several people. For my mother and many other immigrants who ultimately spend most of their lives outside their homelands, it means carrying the memory of a space and time that may not exist anymore, altered by the movement of people, time, and technology. For first generations like myself, it means feeling love, pride, and loyalty to a place I may never visit. Upholding values and traditions that may not make sense here in our home country and chasing information and tradition that might otherwise come more naturally hundreds of thousands of miles away. These symptoms are made easier and are even alleviated by the cultural communities we surround ourselves with in the diaspora.

There is no set recipe for belonging. Culture is personal and dynamic but not without bounds. Language, traditions, and customs are some main ways we can interact with and entwine ourselves within a culture. For Pasifika, or Pacific Islander people, this may manifest in the food we eat, the dances we perform, and the conservative and traditional values we uphold and pass down. One conduit for fostering this connection among Pacific Islanders is *talanoa*.

Simply put, *talanoa* is an indigenous storytelling practice found among many Pacific Island nations. It is used to have open, solution-oriented conversations among parties and often functions as an informal cultural classroom. Participating in the practice of *talanoa* imparts meaningful lessons not just from the conversations being held but through the protocols invoked

\(^{3}\) To grow up in the diaspora.
during these interactions with other Pasifika people. However, engaging in these conversations is not always possible for those in the diaspora, especially if they are further removed from their communities. If locality and accessibility are the issue, the answer may lie in the digital sphere.

Just as social media and tech have made forming and maintaining transnational ties (specific bonds connecting us to cultures, people, and nations through time and space) easier, they have also found their place in digital *talanoas* or *e-talanoas*, making the practice more accessible and allowing those within the diaspora an opportunity not typically afforded to them to commune with other Pasifika people and learn more about their greater and specific cultures. Arguably, *e-talanoa* found its infancy in social media, but in the last few years, especially through COVID-19, it has found new life and created new opportunities for those of us across the diaspora to better utilize technology to reach more people. Navigating this space is exciting, though not without questions and limitations—what do *e-talanoas* look like and how do they differ from their counterparts in the physical realm? What are the applications for *e-talanoa*? How do you create *noa* or establish *va* in an online space? When it is recorded, that increases accessibility and allows for these moments to live on in perpetuity so long as they exist in the digital sphere, but where does that leave the audience now relegated to a viewer instead of a participant?

Today *talanoa* continues to be both studied and used. This research is perhaps no different. First, by utilizing the existing work done by academic scholars and anthropologists, to arrive at a basic understanding of *talanoa*. Second, in looking at various forms of *e-talanoa* such as the United Nations Talanoa Dialogue, ‘*Hange Ha Fokifoki Tunu*’*4* Education Ideas Talanoa Series by Peace Corps Tonga, and The Moanan, and using secondary source analysis to demonstrate

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*4* Tongan Proverb referring to roasting something on a spit- it must be continuously turned and watched; otherwise, it will burn. A topic that is continually being discussed.
various iterations of *talanoa* that exist online. Finally, through an interview with one of the actors in this sphere, The Moanan, it is the aim that some of these questions can be answered or, at the very least, considered with further insight for future conversations on how the digital sphere provides a more accessible and malleable space to extend the reach and involvement of Pacific Islanders around the world. *E-talanoas* are not a replacement for in-person *talanoas*, but rather, by adapting and utilizing digital platforms to share and engage in *talanoa*, a world of learning for non-Pacific Islanders and Pacific Islanders alike is opened, particularly for those in the diaspora.

**Transnational Identity**

When Randolph Bourne conceived the idea of transnationalism, it spoke of the city-bound Italians, the migratory Greeks, and the ancient wayfinders of the Pacific—though he was likely unaware of the last. Bourne argued against our failed melting pot and called for us to embrace new immigrants to the United States into our nationalistic fold. Since his 1961 essay, this transnational ideology has developed further and has become a concept that can be applied to various groups—Pasifika people included.⁵

In *Transnational Pacific Islanders: Implications for Social Work* by Maripa T. Godinet et al., this type of identity is explored further. For Pacific Islanders, this relationship is fostered between our ethnic homelands and diasporic nations for many reasons—remittances, extended or immediate family connection, economic flow, and heritage pride. Furthermore, this identity emphasizes family responsibilities and expectations; as Pacific Islanders, we are “rooted in multiple spaces, times, and cultural structures as a result of exploration of the Pacific Ocean.”⁶

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⁵ Christopher McKnight Nichols, “Citizenship and Transnationalism in Randolph Bourne’s America,” *Peace Review* 20, no. 3 (September 2008): 353, [https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650802330212](https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650802330212).

Going even further, we can recognize how our early identity as voyagers has significantly shaped our interactions with our environments, both culturally and physically. This heritage has led to a special collective identity that calls on Pacific Islanders in the diaspora to “live, learn, and adapt to the demands and expectations of a global environment that transcends multiple cultures, nations, and people.”

Epeli Hau’ofa, a renowned Tongan anthropologist, explores this in his essay “Our Sea of Islands.” Hau’ofa explains:

The new economic reality [following WW2] made nonsense of artificial boundaries enabling the people to shake off their confinement. They have since moved, by the tens of thousands, doing what their ancestors did in earlier times: enlarging their world, as they go, on a scale not possible before. Everywhere they go – to Australia, New Zealand, Hawai’i, the mainland United States, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere – they strike roots in new resource areas, securing employment and overseas family property, expanding kinship networks through which they circulate themselves, their relatives, their material goods, and their stories all across their ocean and the ocean is theirs because it has always been their home. Though the focus of Hau’ofa’s essay is about collective identity and taking control of a narrative, one that usually is peddled to Pacific Islanders as being small and insignificant, Hau’ofa’s words describe our transnational identity. We are part of a broader collective network and, therefore, individually as well. Continuing, Hau’ofa leaves his audience with this lasting impression, “The world of Oceania may no longer include the heavens and the underworld [referring to our grandiose myths and legends], but it certainly encompasses the great cities of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and

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7 Godinet et al., “Transnational Pacific Islanders,” 114.
9 Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” in We Are the Ocean: Selected Works (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 34.
From beyond the shores of our Islands, Pasifika people are now found across the world in various diasporas. With this increased pressure of time and space that separates us from one another, we fall back on the same practices and ocean-centered identity to stay connected to one another and our homelands. This is made even easier through the use of technology to adapt our customs in an ever-changing world.

**Talanoa**

Having traveled so far and stretched our networks further, Pasifika people utilize different forms of communication and relation-building to foster socio-spatial relationships and maintain their sense of moana. One such method dating back to ancestral times is through talanoa. In its simplest description, it is what Sitiveni Halapua has described as a “process of storytelling without concealment.” It is a type of conversation characterized by stories held in a solutions-oriented manner. Moreover, no one stands above the other among those who participate in these conversations. All are equal, and the stories, thoughts, and expressions each participant has to share are to be treated as such, or at least this is the intention. The word talanoa itself hints at this in its definition: in the Tongan language, the translated meaning of tala is to talk, and noa means anything or nothing in particular. Noa can also be understood as meaning zero, referring to balance or equilibrium.

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11 *Moana* means ocean in pan-Pacific languages. The use of *moana* invokes our sense of community as islanders.
Putting these ideas together, to talk, to tell stories, and to do so in a space of perceived equal footing—how do we establish the latter? This is often done through va; to establish noa, we can utilize va. Similar to talanoa, this concept exists among other Pasifika cultures. Va refers to sociospatial relations, which, more literally, means space.\(^\text{15}\) Anthropologist Tevita O. Ka’ili explains this well in his book *Marking Indigeneity: The Tongan Art of Sociospatial Relations*, in which he writes, “In social contexts, va is a space that is formed through the mutual relations (or intersections) between persons or social groups, and it is also an indicator of the quality of the relationship.”\(^\text{16}\) In applying this to talanoa, it is this space, or va, that we hope to create a sense of equilibrium. One way this is often done during initial interactions with others is by first establishing ourselves by providing the names of our parents, our grandparents, our island, and our village. This allows for both parties to ground themselves and find a connection(s) even before entering a discussion. Whether it is between Pacific Islanders of the same nation or differing island nations, the interconnectedness and history of the Pacific region allows for Pasifika people to orient themselves with one another. An example of this using my heritage would look something like, “My mother is Paea Vehikite, Vehikite being my grandfather’s name. My grandmother is a Folau. My mother is from Ha’alalo in Tongatapu.”\(^\text{17}\)

By providing these names and locations, I extend a means to connect. Perhaps they are from the same village or at least know someone from there. Maybe they know my mother or are familiar with either paternal or maternal surname: “Vehikite? In Tongatapu? I know the Vehikites! I went to school with some Vehikites!” As anthropologist Tevita O Ka’ili would put it,


\(^\text{17}\) Tongatapu is the biggest and, therefore, the main island of Tonga, home to the capital city of Nuku’alofa.
this genealogical exchange “[exemplifies] a Tongan way of locating (reestablishing) social connections by organizing and connecting sociospatial words.”¹⁸

Though the above illustrates a one-on-one interaction, often within talanoas relational va in how it connects, and even separates, us is something to be considered along with cultural protocols as they may relate to age, rank, hierarchy, and gender.¹⁹ Furthering this establishment of va, in talanoas, conversation happens in an almost circular manner in which the topic(s) at hand can be continuously addressed and circulated throughout the discussion by various members. In doing so, a lot of information is being passed from person to person through body language and the way we engage. Much of this engagement is similarly rooted in respect and cultural protocols.

**E-Talanoa**

From a traditional perspective,²⁰ I did not have access to talanoas growing up, and for many Pasifika in the diaspora who are more separated from their communities, this is the case as well. However, in the last handful of years, e-talanoa has become a more accessible form of dialogue sharing. There are a couple of reasons for this, including it being a “response to the globalized and technologically advanced world where Pasifika or Pacific peoples’ communal interactions and research engagements reflect their changing environment,”²¹ the diversity and availability of digital spaces and tools, and the pressures of COVID-19.

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²⁰ By traditional perspective I refer to a face-to-face talanoa, in community with other individuals sharing stories and finding solutions.

The arrival of the internet allowed for easier avenues to strengthen transnational ties as is. When I was in elementary school and visited Tonga for the first time, I remember my parents constantly saying, “Tonga is 50 years in the past.” They used this in reference to the style, the fact that my mom was not allowed to wear pants growing up,22 and ultimately, that they did not have internet access or much television broadcast to speak of. This is no longer the case and has not been in nearly thirty years.23 From internet access via satellite24 to the installation of undersea cables bringing multiple Pacific Island nations online since the early 2010s, the region has invested more into its infrastructure and, as a result, has gained access to the broader world.

Mary K. Good alludes to this in the fifth chapter of Reppin’: Pacific Islander Youth and Native Justice edited by Keith L. Camacho. Entitled “HOLLA MAI! TONGAN 4 LIFE!: Transnational Citizenship, Youth Style, and Mediated Interaction through Online Social Networking Communities,” Good talks about visiting Eua, Tonga, in 2008 and being surprised by the number of internet cafes.25 The trip is shaped by Good’s interactions with Tongan youth who prod her about her knowledge of Bebo, a then-popular social media website that helped to connect them with their kin abroad, and how this digital space provided a means of strengthening ties across distances:

The use of Bebo by Tongan youth from the Island of ‘Eua shows remarkable engagement with online spaces that incorporates the digital realm into the Tongan understanding of

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22 Modesty and conservatism were and still are important aspects of Tongan society. Not being allowed to wear pants may not have necessarily been a law more than a cultural norm. Even today, in modern Tongan society, women refrain from wearing revealing clothing outside their homes unless appropriate for athletic events.

23 Although Tonga technically gained internet access via satellite in the late 1970s, it was not widely available to its citizens. It took a while for internet cafes to pop up and for regular people to use this technology. Additionally, this type of internet access was extremely slow.


tā-vā, theorized by ‘Okusitino Mahina and Tevita Ka’ili as the markings of social relations across time and space… The practice employed by youth to communicate with friends and relatives while extending their social reach on Bebo can be interpreted as another dimension of this critical aspect of Tongan life: the maintenance of social relationships through time and (here, transnational and virtual) space. Using this novel form of digital communication, youth nevertheless practiced long-standing forms of *talanoa*…

From 2008 to the 2020s, this connection has only been amplified further and taken on new forms, and such is the case with *talanoa*.

Earlier in this paper, *talanoa*, its functions, and its forms were addressed, but how does that manifest digitally? Like *talanoa*, which has different structures such as *talanoa vave* (involving minimal formality and referring to a quick exchange), *talanoa faikava* (taking place during a *faikava*, one person speaks at a time on a topic), and *talanoa faka’eke’eke* (involving a more specific aim, this type resembles an interview), digital *talanoa*, or *e-talanoa*, can vary depending on the digital platform. The initial view of *e-talanoas* I held was that by engaging online, regardless of platform or simultaneously, so long as an intention was set for *noa*, equality and the open conversation was being held from a Pasifika lens, it could be considered *e-talanoa*. However, my understanding has shifted after implementing secondary source analysis of the various “*talanoas*” hosted online and interviewing The Moanan. On the one hand, there are *talanoas* that are housed and shared in digital spaces, such as the case with many *talanoa* series,

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26 Good, “HOLLA MAI! TONGAN 4 LIFE!,” 132.
27 ‘vave’ meaning quick or fast.
28 ‘faikava’ means to do kava, referring to a gathering of usually men to drink kava— a drink made from the kava root and used throughout the Pacific. This gathering involves sitting in a circle, drinking, singing, conversing, or *talanoa*-ing about various things. Ranging from formal to informal, women are not generally present except for the *tou’a* who prepares and serves the kava.
29 ‘faka’eke’eke’ meaning the way of asking relentless questions.
and then there are talanoas that take place digitally. To illustrate the two and highlight the differences, the following are some examples.

(1) UN Climate Change – Talanoa Dialogue

Spearheaded by the Presidency of the Republic of Fiji, the “Talanoa Dialogue” was put forth at the 2017 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 23) in which they “ask[ed] everyone to participate in “Talanoa Dialogue” to openly and respectfully share stories about climate change from their perspective and how it is affecting their lives, their communities, and the world…[in order to] inform, motivate, and drive more ambitious action that helps achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement [through Talanoa].”31 In this example, the dialogue occurred a year later at COP 23. However, evidence of these conversations still exists in perpetuity online visually through YouTube and is documented in briefs by the UN. Through the UN Climate Change (@UNClimateChange) channel, 13 videos can be found underneath their “COP 23 Videos” playlist as well as through the COP 23 Presidency channel, COP23fi (@cop23fj34), which houses 117 videos, the majority being recordings of talanoas.

(2) ‘Hange Ha Fokifoki Tunu’ Education Ideas Talanoa Series by Peace Corps Tonga

This next example is a talanoa series produced by Peace Corps Tonga. This ongoing dialogue is a “platform to care for and consistently turn ideas around education through conversation or talanoa that results in intellectual nourishment and educational progress.”32 This series utilizes both YouTube and Facebook to share its videos. At the time of this research, a total of 7 videos had been uploaded and shared to the Peace Corps Tonga Facebook page and 6 videos to the Peace Corps Tonga (@peacecorpstonga) YouTube channel. In each episode, Peace Corps


Tonga sits down with a guest to *talanoa* about a topic related to education, sometimes via Zoom and sometimes in person. These are then shared online through their Peace Corps Tonga pages. As with example one, the *talanoa* has previously taken place, thus relegating the viewer to simply a passive consumer.

(3) *The Moanan*

In this final example, The Moanan is an online group composed of two New Zealand-based Pacific Islanders who utilize multiple platforms to “connect Indigenous Pacific knowledge holders and scholars to descendants of the Moana, living in diasporas today.”

Found through their website, their content can be accessed through Spotify, Instagram, YouTube, etc., where they engage in discourse, and share videos, and podcasts about various topics relating to Moana or Pasifika culture. Although their content can be accessed by anyone, they specifically target young Pasifika people in Western diasporic societies looking to connect with their roots who may not necessarily have the means or opportunity to do so.

In this pursuit, their conversations involve a *talanoa* with various guests, inviting their audience to share and interact via comments left on their posts or even participate in one of the in-person *talanoa* events they host from time to time. Active across multiple platforms, The Moanan made its debut on Instagram a little over a year ago at the time of this research and has since made over 100 posts and amassed 32.7 thousand followers. Through their YouTube channel, which is under the same name (@themoanan), they have shared 5 videos since February of 2024. Additionally, season one of The Moanan podcast, launched in January of 2024, has concluded with a total of 11 episodes and


an additional bonus episode about an in-person pō talanoa\textsuperscript{35} that was hosted by them on March 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2024.

The above are examples of digitally recorded talanoas, and often, most of the talanoas that exist to date online fall under this umbrella. What differentiates these from e-talanoas, or talanoas that are taking place in an online space, is the ability to establish va and create noa. In these examples, they exist as recorded talanoa sessions creating limitations for the consumers or audience to interact. First, the viewer is reacting in response, and rather than being a part of the conversation they are instead leaving remarks at the least and generating further conversation at the most, removed from real-time response and interaction. There is however no back-and-forth interaction between the talanoa participants and the audience. This is expressed and expanded upon later during my interview with The Moanan.

\textit{Interview with The Moanan}

While researching e-talanoa, I recalled having come across a couple of different groups through my own Instagram account who had shared posts and stories mentioning talanoas in the past. Though I had no real connection to speak of with any of these pages, I decided to press my luck and send a cold direct message through the app explaining my project and asking if any of these groups would be willing to speak with me. Among the handful of Instagram accounts I reached out to, The Moanan was the only group that responded to my request. Having limited experience with talanoa myself and even less personal familiarity with e-talanoa, being able to converse with a group who both operated within the digital va and had varied hands-on knowledge about e-talanoa served to not only further my understanding but provide context and reframe my initial perspective.

\textsuperscript{35} ‘pō talanoa’ refers to a type of talanoa that takes place in the evening and covers everyday matters from politics to school to daily ongoings.
Over the course of an hour-long conversation via Zoom, I was able to sit down and chat with Laki, one of the two members behind the group The Moanan. Throughout our discussion, we discussed the limitations of using a digital *va* for *talanoa* versus the physical realm and what sets The Moana apart from being considered *e-talanoa* itself. From our conversation, one of the biggest differences was the shape of the *va* itself. Where you would ideally like for all parties to be able to interact and connect in a traditional *talanoa*, digital platforms can force this web to act more linearly instead. This was illustrated by Laki both figuratively and literally:

Okay. So, like, when we think about *The Moanan* online community, I would place [my partner Gen and I] at the center. And then the *va* gets established by people from, you know, the [United] States, other parts of New Zealand, Japan, where ever and this could be several different sort of tethers that tie us into the *va*. Within the physical space, we can make those connections across as well, whereas in the digital space that doesn’t happen.

![Spider web image](image)

When we think about *talanoa*, at least from our position, what we're trying to do through these community events, connecting with people throughout [diasporas], we're trying to connect our people together as well so that this ends up looking more like a spider web.

Using the image of a spider web image and relating it to *talanoa*, imagine a group of people seated in a circle. In a *talanoa* we talk with one another across the circle, next to each other, back and forth, weaving the thread of conversation. Almost as if we are tossing a ball of yarn to one another, never letting go of the thread, but rather holding onto it each time the ball is tossed to us allowing it to continuously unravel as it is passed around. As we continue to discuss this web crosses over and under, creating a web of ideas. In a *faikava*, this depiction works well.
People are seated in a circle, pouring kava and talking late into the night. Jumping from topic to topic. As a digital host for *talanoas* however, this can look less interconnected. Laki showcased this using *The Moanan* and the more linear relationship they have with their audience:

Right now I think it's like a lot linear like it comes from us [*The Moanan*] and we reach out and we connect. And sometimes we do see that people, our community, connect with each other by replying to one another's comments, but because people are solely connected to us in terms of the *va* and not connected to each other it means that there's no sort of philosophy, ideology, or sort of value that anchors the way which we would *talanoa* or engage with one another online.

When we think about like, Western ways of thinking, get from here to there. So when we think about *talanoa* it can just go round and round and round. It's more circular. I guess that's where the limitation would be in contrasting what the digital space does allow for and what it doesn't. Right, that's not to say that it can't work in like a circular way, we see that sort of in Facebook forums. I think that can happen, but I think for us, and for the *The Moanan*, and I think for most people. It really has a look-- that sort of spider-web connection. And so Therefore it's harder, well, it’s just, it's difficult to really engage fully.

In this way, rather than being a form of *e-talanoa*, as you may find in a Zoom room or a Facebook group, groups such as theirs instead act as sources of education and conduits to spark interpersonal connection and community so that talanoa may come later. That still left the question of *e-talanoas*. With this new understanding, what did they look like then? Typically, they were Facebook pages and videoconferencing meetings.

This brought us back to the topic of *va* and *noa*. In *talanoa* one of the ways we begin to establish *va* is by situating ourselves through our introductions and genealogy. This is done as well at the beginning of each podcast *The Moana* puts out; establishing (Specifically referring to this introductory practice) and maintaining *va* falls in line with Pasifika protocol, but protocols are not always known or upheld within digital spaces:

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36 *The Moana*, Zoom interview with the author, May 2, 2024.
I come from my context and therefore there is no *va* that governs the way in which we speak or share with one another. That's why you can get people that will just say whatever they want online because there's nothing, no *va* that enters them into the relationship [that] they share [with] others online. And so, while [The Moana], we've done that by establishing who we are, where we're from, we have a *va* with those who engage with The Moanan, but because that introduction hasn’t happened between all the people who are a part of The Moanan community that *va* doesn't encompass, it's not a complete network.37

This is somewhat circumvented in digital meetings via videoconferencing, where participants can perform introductions, establish themselves, and create *va*. In online message boards as well, where rules and regulations can be put in place alongside moderators to ensure protocols are being upheld and adhered to. Still, even in these Pasifika spaces, the nuances of body language are lost.

At the end of our conversation, we touched on the current limitations of utilizing digital spaces for *talanoa*. Compounded by the lack of cultural competency, digital literacy, and infrastructure, it all appears bleak on paper. However, we remarked on the ability it had as well to connect people across vast spaces, especially across diasporas. To this effect, he pulled up various Facebook pages showcasing group discourse developing over Pacific Culture, people posting old photos seeking information about unknown people pictured, and cross-connections being made online. A case can be made for *e-talanoa* yet as it continues to be developed in an online space. As for myself, it appears no matter the iteration whether it is a recorded *talanoa* or participating in an *e-talanoa* utilizing digital platforms has already proven to do a lot in the realm of connecting Pasifika people. While these technologies are still being explored and more people are turning to online spaces to connect and share, it is exciting to see what is in store for the future, particularly as an accessible avenue to build ties between diasporic communities and link individuals with not just their cultures but with indigenous knowledge.

37 The Moana, Zoom interview with the author, May 2, 2024.
Conclusion

Pasifika people, being transnational in nature, are adept at carrying on culture, customs, traditions, and practices in the face of time and space. Despite this ability, the external pressures of separation and isolation from cultural hearths are unavoidable. By utilizing indigenous tools like *talanoas*, it is possible to overcome some of these hurdles and foster spaces for learning and building cultural competency and identity. When limited by the physical realm, we can look to the digital to extend that hand to more Pacific Islanders across diasporas.

In the digital realm then, we have two ways of interacting with *talanoa*: in the consumption of digitally recorded *talanoas* or the participation in *e-talanoas* themselves. The prior is more readily available, but that does not mean there is no room to shape and develop the latter. *E-talanoa*, in that case, should be considered as a powerful tool in its potential. Though in its current form, it faces significant hurdles in the ability to recreate person-to-person *va* and establish practices and protocol, it also opens up a world of accessibility for Pasifika people who may be limited by their environment or access to cultural opportunities. In both cases of being able to interact with *talanoas* as a viewer or by participating in *e-talanoas*, through these interactions, more Pacific Islanders are exposed to information and glimpses into conversations previously unavailable to them.
Bibliography


Appendix 1

Interview Questions with “The Moanan”

1) The audience for the Moanan particularly targets diasporic Pacific people. What circumstances helped to identify this particular audience and demand for knowledge?

2) Your digital platforms' primary aim is to disseminate knowledge and function as a community, but what led you two to decide to utilize the digital sphere? Why a podcast?

3) Since beginning the Moanan, how has your audience's feedback been in terms of engagement, learning, and fostering of community and cultural knowledge?

4) The Moanan functions as a form of e-talanoa (correct me if I am wrong or you disagree). Was this always the vision going into the project?

4a) What are some of the limitations to being in a digital space versus a physical one, especially as it relates to talanoa?