



**VEITALANOA: USP CLIMATE WAYFINDERS &
EAST-WEST CENTER INDO PACIFIC LEADERSHIP LAB**

MOLIKILAGI BURE & OCEANIA CENTRE
28 APRIL 2025, 2.30PM – 6.30PM

The School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education,
The University of the South Pacific

Laucala Campus, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji

Title: *Veitalanoa*: USP Climate Wayfinders & East-West Center
Indo Pacific Leadership Lab

Cover Artwork: *Save The Turtle* by Ulamila Bulamaibau, 2023,
1835mm x 1280mm

Authors: Katrina Talei Igglesden, Rosiana Lagi, Lavenia Magnus

ISBN 9789821019064

Veitalanoa: USP Climate Wayfinders & East-West Centre Indo Pacific Leadership Lab

PROGRAMME

2.30 Traditional Welcome & Lotu

2.40 Official USP Welcome

2.50 Viliami Vakapuna

3.00 Sailosi Baleiwai

3.10 Helen Pau

3.20 Malakai Waqa-Kaitani

3.30 Peter Emberson

Break Performance

3.50 Zoe Korosavu

4.00 Ulamila Buiravonu Bulamaibau

4.10 Rosiana Lagi

Break Performance & Refreshments

4.30 Veitalanoa – Q&A

6.15 Concluding Remarks & Vote of Thanks

6.30 Farewell

2024-2025

INDO- PACIFIC LEADERSHIP LAB



**LAWRENCE JAY
ALCAIRO**
U.S.A.



**THINLEY
CHODEN**
Bhutan



**JOCTAN
DOS REIS LOPES**
Timor-Leste



**MUHAMMAD UMAR
DRAAZ**
Pakistan



**MICHAEL
DYER**
Australia



**ROBIN
LEWIS**
Japan



**TEIBA
MAMU**
Solomon Islands



**HELENA
MUHAMMAD VARKEY**
Malaysia



**PUNSARA
NAGASINGHE**
Sri Lanka



**MOLEEN
NAND**
Republic of Fiji



**JACQUELYN
OMOTALADE**
U.S.A.



**GLORIA
ROMA**
Ind. State of Samoa



**POUNÉ
SABERI**
U.S.A.



**TAKAHIRO
SEKI**
Japan



**KIMEANG
TANG**
Cambodia



**SHUCHI
VORA**
India

SPEAKERS – BIOGRAPHIES & ABSTRACTS

VILIAMI VAKAPUNA

Mr. Viliami Hevaha 'I Moana Vakapuna is a final-year PhD candidate from Tonga, focusing his research on the topic: 'Otua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofi'a: Indigenizing Education for Climate Action through the Ta and Va of the Fonua Philosophies. Utilizing the Fofola e Fala kae alea e kainga and Pukepuke Fonua Frameworks, he engaged in talanoa (dialogue) and felafoaki (discussions) with 30 Tongan elders and educators both in Tonga and its diaspora.



Through his qualitative research, Vakapuna identified Fonua (land) and Lotu (Christian beliefs) as pivotal foundations for the future of education in Tonga. He advocates for the integration of these elements into the core of Tongan educational systems by educational leaders and policymakers. This integration is crucial, he argues, for embedding Tongan values and beliefs within the educational framework to address contemporary challenges such as climate change and environmental degradation, which also impact the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of Tongan society.

Vakapuna's research underscores the importance of culturally responsive education that aligns with indigenous knowledge systems, thereby fostering resilience and sustainability in the face of global environmental changes.

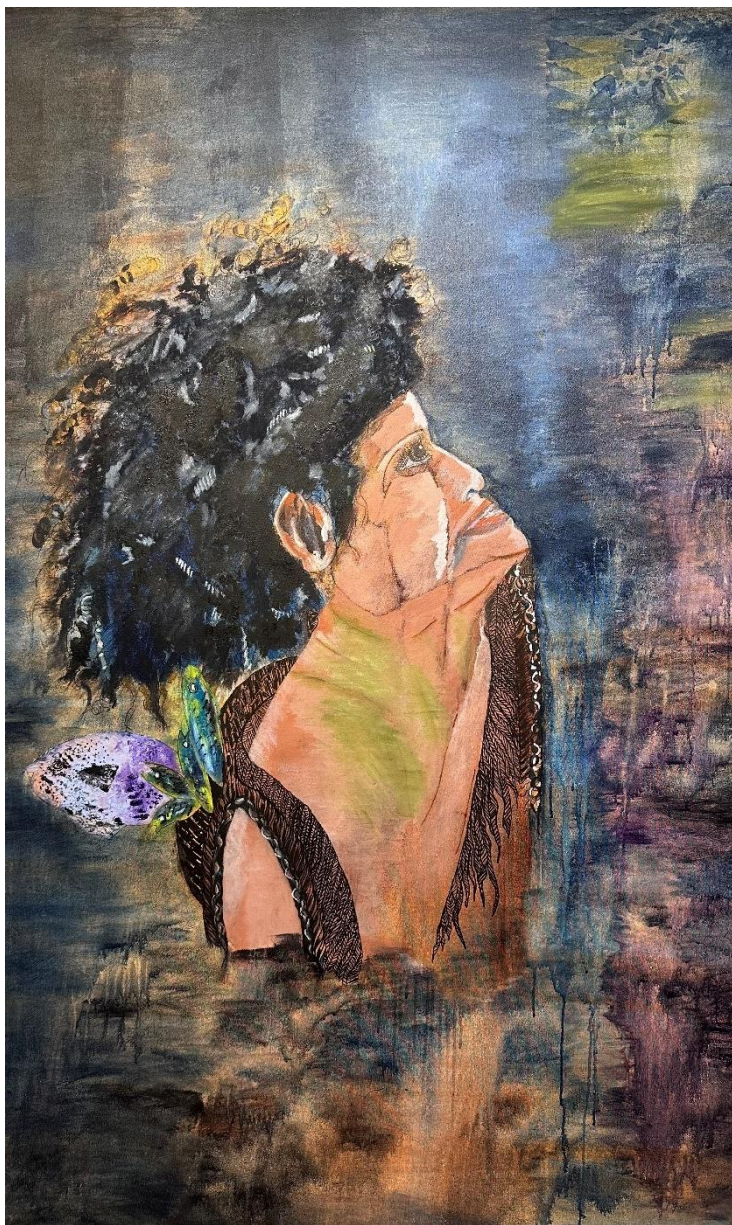
SAILOSI BALEWAI

Mr. Sailosi Baleiwai is a final-year Indigenous Fijian PhD student whose research focuses on *Weaving Indigenous Technology Knowledge and Skills in the Fiji's Applied Technology Curriculum for Year 11 and Year 12*. Using the *Na Bu ni Ovalau* Research Framework, he conducted *veitalanoa* with 22 teachers, 40 students, and artisans in Fiji. His findings revealed that since the arrival of European missionaries and settlers, Indigenous Fijians began to disregard their Ancestral knowledge, skills, and technologies in favor of modern ones.



He recommends developing a thorough method to identify, protect, and share Indigenous Fijian Technology knowledge and practices. This includes introducing cultural exchange programs to improve students' understanding of traditional technologies while fostering cross-cultural cooperation between rural and urban schools. Initiatives such as community workshops, teacher training, digital documentation, and student exchanges are vital for preserving and promoting Indigenous Fijian Ancestral Intelligences and heritage.

This research is important to Mr. Baleiwai because weaving Indigenous Fijian Ancestral Intelligences and technology into the curriculum strengthens cultural identity while equipping students with relevant modern competencies. It ensures that education is rooted in tradition while meeting the evolving needs of our communities and the wider world.



E lima walega na ika, noqu Kalou (Only five fish , my Lord) by Ulamila
Bulamaibau, 2024, 1840mm x 1225mm

HELEN PALU

Thesis Title: Weaving Indigenous Knowledge of Climate Change Adaptation into the Tongan Society and Culture Curriculum.

Helen Palu is a final-year PhD student from Tonga and an educator who has served as a senior assistant lecturer for the Tonga Ministry of Education. Her doctoral research, titled *"Weaving Indigenous Knowledge of Climate Change Adaptation into the Tongan Society and Culture Curriculum,"* explores the critical intersection of indigenous knowledge and modern education in the context



of climate change. Using the *Kakala* research framework and engaging 81 participants (50 elderly individuals from 5 different locations, 31 Education officials), this study delves into indigenous Tongans' perspectives on climate change, the preservation of indigenous knowledge, and effective methods for transmitting this knowledge to younger generations.

It also examines the integration of such knowledge into the existing Tongan Society and Culture curriculum. Preliminary findings reveal the richness of Tongan indigenous knowledge and its relevance in addressing climate challenges, as well as the gaps in its representation within the current curriculum. Helen's research underscores the importance of curriculum reform and advocates for embedding indigenous climate adaptation strategies into educational frameworks, ensuring their preservation and practical application for future generations.

The study recommends the inclusion of relevant indigenous knowledge of climate change adaptation in the Tongan Society and Culture curriculum. By embedding these teachings into classrooms, the research aims to ensure the preservation, dissemination, and practical application of this critical knowledge, equipping future generations with strategies rooted in indigenous knowledge to confront climate challenges. Her work is a significant contribution to both educational development and climate change resilience in Tonga.

MALAKAI WAQA-KAITANI

Malakai Waqa-Kaitani is a postgraduate student pursuing a Master's in Sociology and is a Teaching Assistant with the social work/policy studies at the University of the South Pacific. His thesis focuses on the impacts of climate-induced displacement and immobility dynamics on two indigenous communities in Fiji. He graduated with a postgraduate diploma in Sociology in 2019, and



a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology and Social Work in 2017. He is also the current President of the Association of Fiji Social Work (AFSW) and a Council Board member of the Commonwealth Organization for Social Work (COSW). He has been part of several research projects at USP.

Fiji, like many Pacific nations, faces severe environmental disasters worsened by climate change, with sea level rise threatening to displace over 800 coastal communities within 30 years. Since 2015, the government and stakeholders have begun

relocating some communities. Climate-induced relocation impacts indigenous identity significantly, and literature highlights reluctance among Pacific indigenous groups to move due to fears of cultural loss. Relocating communities is not an easy task, neither pragmatically nor conceptually, and it poses relevant challenges to numerous people around the Oceanian islands. Indigenous Fijians, iTaukei, have to deal with a unique set of obstacles that threaten their traditional way of living, which means their culture and identity as a whole. Psychological and mental health impacts of climate displacement are evident among these indigenous communities. This study is important as it underscores the voices from Fijian communities who chose not to relocate to preserve their Vanua identity. Also, advocates for staying as a viable adaptation strategy with adequate technical and financial support from stakeholders and government of the day.

PETER EMBERSON

Peter Emberson's doctoral research explores the role of traditional knowledge systems in shaping community agency in the context of climate-related human mobility in the Pacific. At a time when climate change and sea level rise are increasingly forcing communities to adapt, relocate, or migrate, traditional knowledge—deeply embedded in Indigenous worldviews and ecological relationships—offers a vital yet often overlooked framework for agency, resilience, and decision-making.



Drawing on case studies across Fiji and Tuvalu, this research critically examines how place-based knowledge, cultural practices, and customary governance systems inform mobility choices and contribute to sustaining identity and wellbeing amidst environmental disruption. Positioned within a Post-Normal Science approach, the study challenges dominant technocratic models of climate response by foregrounding community voice, cultural continuity, and epistemic justice. The research is informed by the author's extensive background in Pacific history, diplomacy, and climate policy, and contributes to emerging regional and global discussions on just and locally grounded approaches to climate mobility.



Ocean Breathing Life by Ulamila Bulamaibau, 2023, 1840mm x 1200mm

ZOE KOROSAVU

The performing arts can be effective in raising awareness and inspiring action on climate change, particularly in the Pacific, where communities are on the frontlines of its impact. Oceania Dance Theatre has, through the years, used traditional and contemporary forms of performance—such as dance, theater, music, and spoken word—to communicate socio-cultural and climate issues in culturally resonant ways.



By weaving environmental narratives with Indigenous knowledge systems and storytelling, Oceania Dance Theatre and the artists – visual and performing arts- not only contribute towards well-informed pacific communities and global audiences but also encourage a sense of agency, urgency and resilience within our communities. The role of the arts as both a medium for advocacy and a space for emotional connection, to nurture our collective memory, cultural preservation and critical thinking in the face of today's societal challenges including climate change (environmental change) which is a very important one in the fight for our survival as people of the sea.

ULAMILA

BUIRAVONU

BULAMAIBAU

Serious concerns over the continuing threat of climate change on the dwindling sea turtle population continue to be publicized by conservation bodies in Fiji. However, the acceptance of these concerns are a challenge as it can be misinterpreted as foreign, introduced or 'new' information by the populace including the traditional conservatives. Owing to its migratory nature, it is important



that everyone globally makes it their business to protect it. Turtle meat continues to be the food of the gods in Fiji. A highly prized delicacy still relished at significant or chiefly functions. The role of religion in conservation is interesting. Christianity figures largely in the lives of the indigenous population. Arguably, it is also used as a veil behind which politics is played and is also often used to influence decision making. Can religion influence decision makers, traditional leaders, the fishermen, the consumers at the end of the food chain to catch or not to, to buy or not to, to eat or not to. Or is it a lost cause as the greed of commercialisation and self-actualisation takes precedence and has pushed values including religion (depicted by the sunken sculpture of Christ and the Cross) to the bottom of the ocean as well.

ROSIANA LAGI

Solesolevaki – Climate Stories, Literacy and Justice

Dr. Rosiana Lagi is the Deputy Head of School (Learning, Teaching and Quality) at the School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education at the University of the South Pacific. Her research interests are Quality Education, Literacy and Ancestral Intelligence of Climate Change Adaptation in Education. She was the International Co-Investigator for the Transforming Universities for Climate Change Program



ClimateU and the Climate Change, Mental Health & Wellbeing in the Pacific Island Frontier Conversations about Trauma, Culture, Resistance, Resilience and Restoration Research Project. She promotes the use of Indigenous Research Methodologies in her research and mentors her research students and assistants to do likewise. She uses Indigenous research methods like *talanoa* and *veitalanoa* and presents the outcome of the research multi-modally through academic papers, Big Books for children, Art Exhibition and Videos. In her work, she found that participants have various perceptions about climate change depending on their experiences. More so, Indigenous Communities have Ancestral Intelligences that they use to forecast changes in seasons and create relevant interventions to reduce risks and climate impacts.

Unfortunately, due to its non-use, they have lost some of these Ancestral Intelligences and practices. In instances where Indigenous communities have to relocate, indigenous people's connection to their *vanua* is the prime factor that prevents them from deciding easily to be displaced. She recommends *Solesolevaki* Participatory Action Research (PAR) for researchers in the area of climate change as it is inclusive and promotes indigenous people's cultural values. Consequently, builds rapport with the researched and ensures climate literacy and justice.



Artwork by Pita Waqanuii, TEK for Climate Change Education; concept by Rosiana Lagi

ISBN 978-982-101-906-4



© All copyright of artworks remains that of the named artists and SPACE thanks the artists for the permission to use their works for this publication. Any further reproduction requires permission.

© Content is copyright of the School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education (SPACE), 2025.