



## Guest Editorial

# The Emergence of a Pacific Criminology: Introduction to the Special Issue

**Moses Faleolo**

Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka, Aotearoa New Zealand

**Miranda Forsyth**

The Australian National University, Australia

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*We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically, and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom. (Hau'ofa 1993: 16)*

At the inaugural symposium on *Pacific Criminology* in 2023, our keynote speaker, a former inmate and former member of one of New Zealand's infamous Sāmoan gangs, asked provocatively: 'What the hell is Pacific criminology?' He then went on to detail his lifetime of experiences within a deeply racist and punitive justice system. He talked about the critical role of relationships, culture, Christianity, and family in overcoming addiction and addressing violence. He emphasised the redemptive and healing power of love, a life-sustaining contribution to his journey. As exemplified by his diverse life experiences, Pacific criminology involves seeing, feeling, and understanding harm, crime, and punishment, as well as peace, love, and healing through the worldview of Pacific peoples. More pragmatically, it also involves understanding and applying Pacific ways of thinking and being to policies and programs within, alongside, and outside of state justice systems. It is a 'by the Pacific for the Pacific' approach that offers alternative visions to the ways that criminal justice is more commonly carried out - ways that are responsive, effective, and sensitive to the lived realities of Pacific peoples. As the authors in this special issue show, having an understanding of the multiple facets of Pacific worldviews helps scholars, practitioners, activists and policymakers to shape new perceptions of crime and responses to it within a broader framework of social justice.

The idea of creating a deliberate space for Pacific criminology to grow and flourish originated in 2013 when criminologist John Braithwaite called for a 'scholarship on crime' that identifies practices 'of a more distinctively Pacific character' (Braithwaite 2013: p 3). In 2020, this call was taken up in a chapter titled *A Case for Pacific Public Criminology*, based on Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu contexts, and signalling the exploration of an aspect of Melanesian criminology (Forsyth, Dinnen and Hukula 2020). When Moses Faleolo, whose PhD *Hard. Hard. Solid! Life histories of Sāmoans in Bloods youth gangs in New Zealand* (Faleolo 2014), came across this work, he reached out to the authors, and hence, the Pacific Criminology Collective (PCC) was born. The PCC brought together scholars from The University of Papua New Guinea, The University of the South Pacific, The National University of Sāmoa, Queensland University of Technology, The University of Auckland/Waipapa

Taumata Rau, Auckland University of Technology/Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau, The Australian National University, and Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka. Our first project was to design and hold the world's first *Pacific Criminology Symposium*, which took place in April 2023 in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Many of the papers in this collection were first presented at this event.

Of course, Pacific criminology has been around much longer, even if it has not been known by that name. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Tamasailau Suaali'i-Sauni has been a Pacific criminologist for over a decade and has produced several seminal works while mentoring other emerging Pacific criminologists, including Arapera Blank-Penetito, Naomi Fuamatu, Fa'afete Taito, and Salevao Faauuga Manase (see Suaali'i-Sauni et al. 2021). Other Pacific criminologists include Leulua'iali'i Laumua Tunufa'i (2017), Fuimaono Dylan Asafo (2022), Litia Tuiburelevu (2018), Folasaitu Julia Ioane (2016), Sesimai Havea (2021), Byron Seiuli (2016), Fiona Hukula (2015) and Nayahamui Rooney (2017). And it is probable there are many others we may have inadvertently overlooked at the time of writing this introduction. However, this special issue on Pacific criminology is likely the beginning of a new section of that intellectual voyage, wherein an international journal features a collection of papers authored by both Pacific and non-Pacific criminologists and focused on the Pacific Islands region.

In this introduction, we reflect briefly on the nature of the movement dedicated to creating Pacific criminology, including its linkages with other branches of criminology, what makes it distinct, and some of the challenges it faces. This discussion provides context for the papers in this collection, the themes and contributions of which we will outline following our initial reflections. Overall, our discussion draws from both the formal and informal exchanges that occurred during the Symposium in 2023.

So, what the hell is Pacific criminology? We do not think of it as a clearly defined body of scholarship, but rather as an emerging awareness that there is something very exciting and potentially transformative in approaching the traditional concerns of criminology – crime, violence, punishment, and healing – through a Pacific sensibility.

What do we mean by 'the Pacific' in this context? We note that all forms of categorisations inherently involve political dimensions, often creating groups of insiders and outsiders. Our intention here is not to exclude, but rather to clarify the focus of attention in this emerging field. As such, Pacific criminology is primarily focused on the voices, experiences, needs and resources of the indigenous inhabitants of the Pacific Islands region, including those who live in independent nations, those whose nations are self-governing and those who are still colonised, as well as the voices of those who have migrated out of the region and settled in various host countries. This covers a spectacularly diverse set of peoples, from those living in the cloud covered forests of Papua New Guinea's Highlands, to tech-savvy Pasifika<sup>1</sup> university students in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, to those living and working in fishing villages perched on coral atolls barely above sea level. The region also has diverse colonial legacies with significant criminological implications, such as the high levels of incarcerations among First Nations peoples in settler colonies like Australia and New Zealand. This diversity brings forth a range of concerns of potential interest to criminologists, spanning from hyper-local challenges through to the emergence of transnational crime networks and the complexities of criminal deportation.

It would be foolish, even arrogant, to imagine that what we term Pacific criminology could represent such a diverse range of peoples and contexts. Perhaps a more modest aspiration is to be a space in which voices from the Pacific region can be respected, promoted, and brought together, motivated by creating opportunities for heeding the unique perspectives and knowledges of Pacific peoples who have typically not been represented throughout the history of criminology. This intention aligns with the sentiments expressed by the great Pacific scholar Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) in the opening quote, where he draws attention to the ongoing marginalisation and belittlement of the Pacific region, predicated on an understanding of the Pacific as consisting of small, fragmented, and isolated islands. Hau'ofa contends that the Pacific and its inhabitants should not be defined by the smallness of their islands, but by the greatness of its ocean.

The interplay between similarity and difference across the Pacific region was explored at the 2023 Symposium in the context of planning and holding a welcome kava or 'ava ceremony. During the preparation, hosted by two Sāmoan leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand, there was discussion about how features from other Pacific nations could be included, such as the Fijian distribution of kava bowls and the Vanuatu tradition of turning away from others to drink. The discussion was respectful and curious – and accommodations were made in a way that created a very original opening ceremony. The hybridity of the event was compounded by the land on which it was held - the welcoming halls of Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka, itself sitting on the lands of the Māori people.

This approach of treasuring the diversity and heritage of the Pacific, while at the same time supporting a shared commitment to work together, based on open and honest relationships and inclusive and enduring partnerships within the region and beyond,

also sits at the heart of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Continent. The Strategy acknowledges that all Pacific peoples have an ‘undeniable connection to their natural environment, resources, livelihoods, faiths, cultural values and traditional knowledge’ (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2022: 6).

We turn now to the question of the resonance that Pacific criminology has with other criminologies, drawing special attention to four. The first is Critical criminology and its emphasis on power and inequality as central components in understanding crime and responses to crime. This perspective acknowledges that certain groups, who are often marginalised and disadvantaged, are disproportionately labelled as criminals, while the actions of more powerful groups may go unnoticed or unpunished. Power structures within society, as well as between societies, countries and regions, including economic, political, and institutional forms of power, play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of criminalisation and criminal justice (Michalowski 1996; Taylor Walton and Young 1974). By acknowledging and interrogating these power structures, the critical perspective seeks to unveil and address the systemic injustices embedded in many state criminal justice systems, ultimately advocating for a more equitable and socially conscious approach to preventing, understanding, and healing in the wake of crime. This is the case both in those countries where Pacific peoples are minority populations and in independent Pacific countries.

Pacific criminology also has an affinity with philosophies and discourses highlighted in Southern criminology (Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo 2016; Connell 2007). This is a leading theoretical development that seeks to overcome the perpetuation of colonial power relations reflected in the unequal flow of knowledge between the Global North and the Global South. Further, Pacific criminology resonates strongly with Indigenous criminology (Cunneen and Tauri 2016; Cunneen and Tauri 2019). This is based on the realisation that after centuries of colonisation, the contemporary position of Indigenous and First Nations peoples in the wealthy settler colonial states of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, and the United States is one of profound social, economic, and political marginalisation. High rates of victimisation, over-representation in criminal justice systems, ongoing racial discrimination and hate crime are all features of Indigenous and First Nations peoples’ experiences of settler colonialism. Indigenous criminology sets out to provide the basis for a new explanatory model for understanding Indigenous and First Nations peoples’ contact with the criminal justice systems, one firmly based in the historical and contemporary conditions of colonialism and settler colonialism.

The fourth philosophy and discourse related to Pacific criminology is Minority criminology (Garland, Spalek and Chakraborti 2006; Phillips and Bowling 2003), which critiques criminological positivism, namely the researchers’ tendencies to rely heavily on quantitative data, ignoring the thoughts and lived experiences of community members. The study of race, ethnicity, crime, and justice usually involves conducting research on racial and ethnic differences in crime and justice patterns, or the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system. The (race and ethnic) minority perspective instead emphasises the construction of a biography to describe an individual’s unique living situation. Making efforts to incorporate racial and ethnic minorities into criminology is essential.

Pacific criminology is an alternative way of criminological theorisation that simultaneously draws upon these other criminological epistemologies but is also transcendentally distinctive and unique. So, what is distinctive about Pacific criminology? We explore this query through the nine articles in this special issue. The contributors include both Pacific Islanders and scholars from other regions, with the vast majority of articles authored or co-authored by Pacific Islands scholars. And before proceeding, we wish to make it clear that we wrote the following discussion with the intent to invite more discussion, and even contestation, rather than staking any claim to being definitive or constraining.

To start, it seems that most fundamentally, Pacific criminology is criminology imbued with Pacific values. Despite the rich diversity of Pacific communities, and differing values, ways of living, and beliefs, several enduring cultural values bind together a largely agreed-upon set of common Pacific values (Ministry for Pacific Peoples 2022). These prominent values include love, respect, reciprocity, spirituality, family, community, collectiveness, cultural obligations, kinship, and protocols (Amituanai-Toloa 2009; Health Research Council 2014; Tamasese et al. 2010). These values have broader resonance across the Pacific Islands region as a whole, as shown in the Sāmoan practices of *fa’a Sāmoa*, the Fijian practice of *i-tovo vaka Viti* (Fijian way of life); Tonga’s *Faa’i Kaveikoula*; Kiribati’s *te mwaneaba* system, Vanuatu’s *kastom* system, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> To the extent that these values are embedded in Pacific criminology, it is part of what makes the scholarship that emerges distinctive.

Placing Pacific values at the centre of Pacific criminology requires a fundamental re-conceptualisation of how scholarship is conceived, produced, and shared. It impacts on research ethics, methodologies, peer review practices and publication routes. It even requires re-examination of university administrative procedures, which are often poorly equipped to accommodate cultural transactions. In relation to research methodologies, there is already a rich vein of scholarship on which to draw (Anae 2019; Bennett et al 2013; Nabobo-Baba 2008; 'Otunuku 2011; Sauni 2011, to name but a few), and the concept of the *talanoa* as a place to hear and value different knowledges is gaining currency, even outside of the Pacific region.

The integration of Pacific philosophies into criminological theories is also a key dimension of Pacific criminology. **Moses Faleolo and Naomi Fuamatu**'s article *Fa'a Sāmoa Criminology: An Aspect of Pacific Criminology Counternarrative* presents a brief insight into what Pacific criminology theory is and how it is applied to shed light on further information considered invisible to non-Pacific criminologists but obvious to Pacific criminologists. It refers to a particular worldview called *fa'a Sāmoa* as a key feature of a Pacific lens into theorising and analysing crime. Two case studies are presented: the first involves collecting life histories from former and current gang-involved Sāmoan people, and the second provides insights into the voices of Sāmoan young people who have experienced New Zealand's Youth Justice system, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. The praxis relationship is significant, but more importantly, the reading invites theorists, policymakers, professionals, and researchers to draw on Pacific worldviews in their understanding and designing of interventions.

**Sam Amosa**'s article, *Fa'avae: A Samoan Theory of Crime from the 'South' Pacific* delves deeper into the Sāmoan worldview of *fa'a Sāmoa* as an example of Pacific criminological conceptualisation: *fa'avae*, *fa'a-vae*, and *fa'a – vae*. In the context of speaking and writing in English, most Pacific peoples move out of their comfort zone to integrate another language and culture that have different sounds and ambiguous meanings compared to their own background. It is often an awkward or anxious experience. This article challenges non-Pacific peoples to step out of their comfort zones and wrap their heads around trying to understand foreign terminologies; it does so by immersing them in an experiential learning, so they experience what it is like to be a Pacific person accessing a criminal justice system that is not based on their own worldview. Amosa also focuses on the role of Christianity in Pacific criminology, making a call for a public theology to address the growing issues of crime in Sāmoa.

The role of Christianity, culture and custom in addressing crime and harm is likely to be a key theme in Pacific criminology. This theme is explored in a number of the collection's articles. Repeatedly, we see attention being drawn to the flexibility, adaptability, and resilience of both culture and religion – and a rejection of the binary ways that Northern criminology has tended to set up the relationship between human rights, on the one hand, and custom and religion on the other. Pacific scholars are reimagining the theoretical possibilities for the relationship to be much more varied, and the possibilities for synergy much more profound, than standard criminology theory had envisioned. **Sara Amin, Selina Momoyalewa and Sepola Taata Peniamina**'s article, *Culture, Religion and Domestic Violence: Reflections on Working with Fiji and Tuvalu Communities*, explores how specific cultural practices and religious discourses and beliefs are mobilised by perpetrators, victims, and their communities, and how the work of addressing gender-based violence responds. They conclude that a Pacific criminology of domestic violence (as both academic disciplines, but also in a field of practice) is emerging that will 'challenge the idea that culture, tradition and faith are reserves of patriarchy and enforcers of gendered subordination.' They conclude by advocating for the need to equip ourselves to listen and speak across different ways of being and knowing.

The entanglement of custom and religion in addressing domestic violence is a theme also pursued in the contribution by **Anand Chand, Maureen Karan, David Mapuru and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba**, *The Police Practice of Resolving Domestic Violence in Fiji*. This article presents the findings of an empirical investigation into how police in Fiji address cases of domestic violence in practice, finding that the official zero-tolerance policy is often not followed, with officers instead frequently encouraging complainants to use traditional customary and religious ways of settling cases. The authors conclude that the reality of plural policing needs to be better integrated into police training, and that police should receive instruction on how to navigate competing customary considerations to ensure that women victims have options for safeguarding their well-being, interests and rights.

Insights into police culture in the Pacific is a theme also pursued in **Cassandra Harry**'s article, *Solomon Islands Police Perceptions of Australian and New Zealand Policing Assistance*. This article focuses on the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, and particularly their perceptions of the post-conflict police reforms introduced as part of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) initiative. In her article, Harry contrasts the publicly positive framing of the reform as a 'gold standard' with the views of police officers within the force. She details the range of concerns and criticisms they raised, including worries about a lack of discipline and discomfort with the contemporary forms of policing introduced by outsiders that are alien to the Solomon Islands context. She further emphasises the perpetuation of a culture of dependency and subsequent hindering of institutional autonomy.

A further emergent theme in Pacific criminology is the relationship between those who have been convicted and their ancestral community. This can be particularly fraught when involving Pacific Islands deportees from settler states such as Australia, New Zealand and the United States, a concern explored by two articles in the collection. In *Sasa'a le fafao?: Approaches to Return and Reintegration of Criminal Deportees (Returnees) into Sāmoa*, **Henrietta McNeill and Magele Vernon Mackenzie** discuss well-known problems faced by deportees, such as a lack of knowledge of the language or of cultural protocols. They describe one very powerful initiative, developed in Sāmoa, to address this problem and help deportees establish 'new beginnings.' Their article attributes the success of the initiative to the determined way its leaders rejected the pressure to simply apply 'best

practice' approaches from the Global North, and instead contextualised their approach to the local culture. However, they also detail the difficulties in sustaining such initiatives over the long haul, citing the constant risk of slippage into more standardised law and order and risk-based framework approaches.

**Moana Hafoka** addresses a similar topic but in relation to U.S. deportees in Tonga in his article, *Using the Past to Guide the Future: Criminal Deportee (Re)integration in a New Homeland*. Using life histories, he explores the many challenges faced by the deportees in Tonga, bringing their stories to life through extensive use of evocative quotes. In addition to recommending education about the risk of deportation in the United States he concludes that deportee reintegration is aided by the collaboration of government, religious groups, and families.

Another common theme we highlight as valuable in Pacific criminology concerns the role of non-state actors in responding to crime and hurt. As one of the special issue's authors, socio-legal expert Sinclair Dinnen observed to one of the editors, Pacific criminology orients towards community rather than state. The Pacific Islands have long been acknowledged as sites of rich legal pluralism, and the entanglement between the different normative orders of state, religion and custom has continued to become more complex and varied over time. Introducing yet another strand into the mix, **Craig Jones and Michael S. Wagambie** discuss the role mediation can play in resolving the highly tense situations that can arise following allegations of sorcery in communities, explored in their article, *Mediation in Matters Involving Sorcery in PNG Villages and Remote Australian Indigenous Communities*. Excitingly, their article engages in a comparison between a Pacific nation – Papua New Guinea – and an Indigenous community of Aurukun in Australia. There is a huge potential for further comparative work to be undertaken between Pacific criminology and First Nations scholarship from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere, and it is hoped this agenda will develop and flourish in the years to come.

Finally, the theme of hybridity of conflict resolution and governance mechanisms is expanded upon by **Sinclair Dinnen** in his comprehensive account of the evolution of different institutional forms for justice and security governance in the two post-conflict contexts of Bougainville and Solomon Islands. Through careful consideration of their different colonial and post-conflict histories and agendas, his article, *Competing Visions and Converging Realities? Justice and Security Governance in Post-Conflict Bougainville and Solomon Islands*, shows that each has in practice arrived at a more or less productive hybridity heavily reliant on local institutions. One important factor in the more successful hybrid forms he identifies is the role of actors or mechanisms that can productively link the state with the local. His account shows the important contribution historical understandings can make to understanding contemporary institutional structures.

We conclude by observing that this special issue is the first collection to emerge under the banner of Pacific criminology. We opened this special issue by referring to the great Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa and his correcting of the way the Pacific region has been disrespectfully characterised by ill-informed commentators and researchers. Hau'ofa says "we must wake up to this ancient truth" and this is what this special issue represents. An awakening that is expanded on in the *Epilogue's* poem by Tamasailau Suaali'i-Sauni and we in the "Blue Continent". **Tuvalu Lauganiu and Tamasailau-Suaali'i-Sauni** note that this special issue is just the beginning and the need to keep the home fires burning. It is exciting to be part of a Pacific criminology movement and its potentiality can do many things like the radical rethinking of the criminal justice system and the cultivation of intergenerational, interdisciplinary, intercultural, inter-legal and intersectional conversations.

While it covers important topics and perspectives, many more pressing topics and vital voices are missing, including those from the island nations in the northern Pacific (also known as Micronesia). It is hoped that Pacific criminology will be a space in which conversations over the role of Christianity, culture, gender, human rights, and other important issues will continue to be held, with a wide range of perspectives aired. While not written about in this collection, views were aired at the Symposium indicating that some scholars find the dominant role of Christianity in the Pacific region to be counter to women's rights or the decolonisation agenda, and others find it to be exclusionary of homosexual and gender diverse minorities. As the journey for Pacific criminology continues, we hope this group of scholars can navigate the dynamic tides and complex currents creating safe spaces for robust conversations and listening to diverse perspectives on these and other challenging issues. There is no intent to either demonise or to glorify the Pacific region. There has been too much of both. Rather, we seek to come together, to drink kava, to eat and to converse on one another's lands. In this spirit of unity and respect, we hope to learn from one another and from the wisdom of those gracious enough to share their lived experiences with us.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the authors, reviewers, and critical colleagues whose input and suggestions have been so helpful in producing this collection. We would also like to acknowledge the support of the universities that supported the *Pacific Criminology Symposium* that this special issue draws from, namely Queensland University of Technology, The University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau, Auckland University of Technology/Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau, The Australian National University, and Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka. In addition, we would like to thank the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology (ANZSOC) for its support for the Symposium, and ongoing encouragement concerning the formation of a thematic group on Pacific criminology. We would like to acknowledge funding from the Australian Research Council (DP200103576) to support this publication. Finally, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ms Felicity Tepper. Her high-quality, helpful and dedicated editing support contributed enormously to the success of this collection.

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Pasifika’ originated in Aotearoa New Zealand and is used interchangeably in this special issue on Pacific criminology collection to define individuals and groups who are born in the host countries their migrant Pacific parents settled in and whose lineage traces back to their Pacific roots. Pacific criminology also represents these voices. As Burnett (2012: 488) explains: “‘Pacific’ signifies research relating directly to the Pacific region, while ‘Pasifika’ refers to the educational experiences of Pacific peoples residing in New Zealand.’

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Romulo Nayacalevu for bringing together these different Pacific conceptual framings as part of his PhD research into human rights in the Pacific Islands.

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