

Ko Muna mo Poto Tuvalu - Views on Wisdom and Knowledge as the core values of 'Art'

*A commentary by
Reverend Elder Suamalie Naisali Tafaki Iosefa Naisali.
MBE.*



Illustration by Cecelia Faumuina

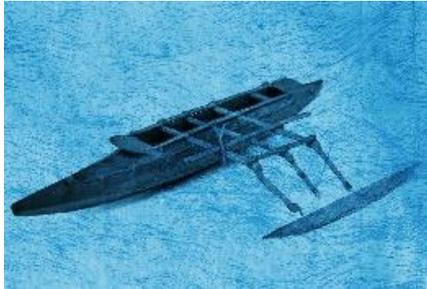
Author



Image credit: Mana Moana – Class of 2020
– [Leadership NZ](#)

Reverend Elder Suamalie Naisali Tafaki Iosefa NAISALI, MBE. JP hails from the little Island of Nukulaelae, Tuvalu and descended from Tokelau, Tongarewa, Kiribati, Tonga, and Sāmoa. He grew up in Tuvalu and was commissioned by the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, the main Christian Church of Tuvalu, to move to New Zealand to seek innovative approaches and missional strategies for the holistic wellbeing of the Tuvalu diaspora here and abroad. Suamalie is a prominent Pacific Leader, a Church Minister, Theologian and Writer, an artist and knowledge holder of Tuvalu culture and Indigenous languages and composer. He is a Peace Ambassador of Universal Interreligious Peace Federations, proactive globally, internationally and acts locally by challenging global leaders, politicians, academia, scientists, and leaders to build a thriving epistemology through solidarity and quality environmental foreign policies, so as to protect our cosmos and provide a thriving and resilient Tuvalu. Our goal is to save Tuvalu, this will contribute to protecting our Ocean, Land, our ingenuity culture, our healthy environment, and ecological platform. He has worked in the Church Community, Non-Governmental, Health and Wellbeing sector and is actively involved, at Senior Management, on issues relating to strategy, leadership and development for the broader Primary Healthcare Sector by promoting the focus on reducing the inequalities in Health and Disability and understanding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. He was formerly an Advisory Member for Minister of Pacific Island Affairs, Ministry of Social Development, Creative New Zealand and Ministry of Immigration; and former Board Member for Waitakere City Council, Auckland Tuvaluan Society and TOA Pasifika. Suamalie is currently an Assistant Researcher, the President of Climate Change Action Forum, Chairman of Tuvalu Language Foundation, Executive Member of Pacific Leadership Forum, and Matua Council for WDHB. He is an Advisor for Te Uluniu Tuvalu Taumatua, an activist of Climate Injustice and Integrity of Creation, a Peace Ambassador of Universal Peace Federation, a Justice of the Peace for New Zealand, and was awarded the Grand of the Dignity of Ordinary Member of the Civil Division of the Order of the British Empire (MBE).

Front image caption & credit



Name: Vaka faika (Fishing canoe).

Place: Funafuti, Tuvalu.

Description: This is a vaka faika made of lakau (wood) and kafa (sennit). The fuatino (hull) is carved from two pieces of lakau that are lashed together with kafa. The puke a mua (prow) and puke a tua (stern) are carved to emphasize a sharp point that cuts through water. Four

narrow pieces of lakau are lashed across the fuatino which would have been used as seats. The seat nearest to the puke a tua would have been reserved for the tautai (fisherman) and is called nofoaga a tautai (fisherman's seat). Three kiato (cross booms) made of long, cylindrical pieces of lakau are lashed across the fuatino also. A wide plank of lakau is lashed alongside the fuatino and may have been an allocated space for tulumu (tackle box). An ama (float) made from a light piece of lakau is no longer attached to this vaka but was lashed to the kiato at one point. A foe (paddle) made of lakau also, has come apart from the vaka but would have been lashed across the kiato for easy access. A forked piece of lakau is lashed upright to the kiato, this may have been used to support the kofe (fishing rod) when it was not in use. Vaka faika were used for fishing and could carry more than one person at a time. Replica models of vaka faika were often created as collectible items for the tourist trade.

Credit: Illustration by Cecelia Faumuina, based on the following Vaka faika - [Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira](#), 1936.295, 24136.5

Source: The Name, Place and Description have been taken directly from the following link: https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collections-research/collections/record/am_humanhistory-object-90963?c=ecrm%3AE22_Man-Made_Object&k=canoe%20models&dept=Pacific&ordinal=0

Ko Muna mo Poto Tuvalu

A commentary by
Reverend Elder Suamalie Naisali Tafaki Iosefa Naisali

Wisdom and Knowledge as the core values of 'Art'.

“Ko Muna mo Poto” is my definition for Art, it is the answer to our wellbeing today. From the moment of birth, human life is essentially a process of “KO MUNA”, wisdom. “KO POTO”, knowledge, is the art and the philosophy that attributes to the definition of a true essence of our existence, purpose, and function. Ko Muna mo Poto is a process of our core values and a matrix of our self-awareness. The co-existence of the wisdom and knowledge of our tupuna (ancestors) are exemplary in the core values of our relationship to the spiritual world. All of this, fashion and contribute to the ecological platform that accomplished the true nature and meaning of life in my smallest archipelago of Nukulaelae from Tuvalu.

The self-awareness of Muna and Poto is the core value of what 'art' is, from a Nukulaelae lens, which is about remembering, recalling, and revitalizing ancestral legacies and cultural resources that are fundamental and essential for optimal contemporary living. It is the epistemology and holistic approach to a Nukulaelae view of wellbeing. It is the expressions of principles and relationality and spirituality relationship between us and our tupuna. This relationality or “Vasia” (space) is transmitted through Muna mo Poto of different forms of art, experiences, skills and techniques. They are manifested in the transformation of our culture, values, and contemporary expressions of art forms and skills. According to the searching and seeking blessings and protections from the spiritual powers of our tupuna, the following incantation was used in my island of Niutao to reconnect, in this form of chant and prayer.

Tui E Tiu O, O O O
E mana koe te Leva o Leva
E mana, Koe mana, Tou mana
E mana koe mai te Matalagi kite Palelagi
Avaka se sauola mo se saumanuia
Avaka se tai malino, se tai taume, se tai laumalie
Fakato ifo tou fiafia, alofa mo tou filemu I te malamaga nei
Tiu E Tiu O, O O O.

Searching and seeking to you our origin and ancestor spirit.
Your existence is the source of life.
You are omnipotent, omnipresence and almighty.

Your omniscience from the horizon to the heavens.
Protect our ecological platform and holistic wellbeing.
Protect our ocean, our land, our vibrant wellbeing.
Grant us joy, love, justice, and integrity of creation.
Searching and seeking you, you, you O.

Instead of foregoing, forgetting, acculturating and assimilating to succeed, our Muna mo Poto, are seen and kept as rich resources of advantages, pride and competitive edge, complexities and nuances, polyculture capital, and a way of reaping the diversity dividend. These facets of wisdom, transmitted through Ko Poto, are artistic knowledge and functions that can be taught. This open artform, of Muna mo Poto, allows visioning and continuity to pass down to generations, giving to others the essence of knowledge, so that they do not have to repeat the same mistake that disrupt the wellbeing of community.

When I asked my father to teach me the knowledge of becoming a fisherman, and he said “KAPO TE VAKA SE TAGINA” – Live for the sake of others. This is the very core value of knowledge. It is the responsibility and true meaning of stewardship that is transcendence and freely given. Givers may not even see the effects and the flourishing of their efforts in their lifetime, and in fact may not receive any recognition or reward for their contributions. Now is the time for continuity, transformations and connectedness of our arts to our children and communities.

Today

Today, however, we are facing serious, unprecedented challenges. Now we live in the crucible of the most extraordinary moment in time. Never before have we faced the vast ethical and global challenge of this pandemic COVID-19, climate change policies, environmental economics, income and wealth distribution inequalities. Our Poto, our values, ethics and the spiritual dimension are the most fundamental art for our recovery and vibrant wellbeing.

The world that we live in, is in a threshold of being politically correct rather than morally or culturally correct. As a musician and composer, I can see Muna mo Poto, our wisdom and knowledge, and our artforms as providing an innovative approach to ‘Save Tuvalu’ and ‘Save our World’ from the adverse effect of Climate Change.

As Tuvaluan we are people of the moana, ocean, and I ask that the world protect our moana and fenua, our land, as the very essence of our existence and true home from our tupuna. How can we protect our ocean life of fish populations and other species of marine life and creatures so that they are thriving and safeguarded with a clean ocean from pollution and pillage? An ocean that gives us so much meaning, a status that provide solace to food and the air we breathe. The concepts of “Kapo”, compassion, and “Alofa”, love, is a process of refashioning solidarity and unity of hearts as a positive strategy to preserve a people and

integrity of a nation, a language, a better future for the whole world. Art is an answer to our wellbeing. Let us look at the vaka (canoe) and its contributions to our wellbeing.

Te Vaka

Te Vaka our word for canoe, was used by our tupuna to cross the sea and the ocean to previously unknown destinations. The art of navigation used by our tupuna to sail in “foulua” or outrigger canoes, using sails with the outrigger facing the oncoming wind. The outside of the hull was flat, which stopped the wind pushing the canoe sideways; the inside was rounded to keep the water flowing between the hull and the outrigger. Carefully counter-balanced decks maintained overall stability. The knowledge and skills of our navigators was their ability to read the night sky. The rising and setting points of the brightest and most distinctive stars and planets were gauged with the help of sophisticated star compasses, and then memorised. Compasses were also used to chart the winds.

Navigators steered their vaka toward a star on the horizon. When that star rose too high in the sky or set beneath the horizon, another would be chosen, and so on through the night. Our tupuna use the sun, the moon, planets or stars, their course could be gauged according to ocean swells. It is also important to line up the vaka with wind direction, using pennants tied to the mast and rigging as guides. The end of the journey is to reach the destinations. Our destination in Muna mo Poto is the holistic wellbeing of our people.

Climate Change

In October 2018, at the Asia Pacific Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal, I was invited as an international speaker on Climate Change together with Hon President Anote Tong of Republic of Kiribati. I was inspired to challenge a global audience of Political Leaders, Religious Leaders, Theologians, Academics and Scientist with these provoking remarks to leave a better world, safer for my grandchildren and our cosmos:

- Today we are positioned to be a common platform to address with appropriate solutions related to - religious and ideological extremism, organised terrorism and corruptions, environmental pollutions, poverty and moral decline.
- Our values are our anchor with its generations weaving the next foundation to stand on.
- Stand up for Peace and the Integrity of Creation and to save Tuvalu to save our world now!
- HIKI KO TE VAKA - Be confident in our endeavours.
- HOPO KI LUGA - Be enablers for a peaceful world.
- ALO KI MUA - Let us paddle together to save Tuvalu to save our cosmos.



LAGI-MAAMA
Academy | Consultancy



PACIFIC
COOPERATION
FOUNDATION

Our art of Ko Muna mo Poto is the answer to our wellbeing today. “Ko Muna o te Fale”, in essence, it pursued a common understanding of the meaning of being good. This is in harmony with the world’s great religious teachings “Te alofa ki sose fakaalofa”, which is living for the betterment of vulnerable communities, and is the opposite of living for yourself. The concept of alofa, love, help to lay the foundation for appreciating the role and responsibilities of all people in building vibrant communities. Alofa in the cognitive realm becomes truth, in the realm of action it becomes right conduct, and manifested in feelings of love becomes peace. We are in time of radical transformations, by building families of true love, raising children of good character, guided by the principle and art of living for the sake of world peace that we contribute to sustainable peace that save Tuvalu to save our world.

Ke manuia.