

EMERGING EPISTEMOLOGIES

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In this address I want to put together some thoughts on the relationship between Pacific studies and new epistemological concerns that are becoming evident among Pacific island writers and scholars.

There are significant changes in consciousness, a new phase of research and scholarship in the region, the trajectory of various activities running parallel to what Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo refer to as “dehegemonisation”,¹ a further stage in decolonisation, away from simple protest and resistance towards efforts to decentre Western discourses about knowledge. The main objection to the latter discourses is not only that they assume universality yet incorporate within them notions of inequality of races and superiority and inferiority of cultures but also they describe how knowledge is conceived, constructed, coded and communicated.

I would like to reiterate the argument that in postcolonial studies intellectual and political practice cannot be easily separated; we have to view the development I have referred to in the context of change of events in the Pacific that includes coups, insurrections, failure in governance, spiraling poverty and various forms of deprivation as well as globalization of economy and culture. However, first I would like to clarify Pacific studies and define the epistemological projects.

Engaging with Pacific studies means uncovering and interrogating its colonial origin. The colonial legacy is evident in the activities of collecting information for policy-makers, scholarly research testing its models, methodologies in pristine sites, and orientalist of various schools working out their fantasy and desire. The influential centres and practitioners are located outside the region, and much of the knowledge produced has little value for improving the quality of life for Pacific peoples. Clearly then there is an urgent need to decolonize Pacific studies; there are many discussions going on among Pacific island scholars and writers on how they can together address the problem.

The most pertinent discussion, in my view, is focused on local epistemologies, that is how Pacific island peoples conceive, theorise and construct knowledge. Epistemology, according to Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, “refers to both the theory of knowledge and theorizing knowledge,

¹ David Welchman Gegeo and Karen Ann Watson – Gegeo “How we Know”: Kwara’ae Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology”, *The contemporary Pacific*, Vol 3 No.1 Spring 2001, pg 55

including the nature, sources, frameworks, and limits of knowledge. Epistemology is concerned with who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence of constructing knowledge, what constitutes truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth, how valid inferences are to be drawn, the role of belief in evidence, and related issues".²

A large portion of the body of knowledge that make up Pacific studies consists of accounts and interpretations of Pacific social, cultural and physical environment, and they are produced mostly by authors referred to by Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo as "cultural outsiders" Accordingly to this definition the "cultural outsiders form an epistemological community but they do not constitute the epistemological community that produced the knowledge in the first place."³ Even when the activities of cultural outsiders is focused on theorizing and constructing narratives of how pacific peoples produce knowledge, that do no form local epistemologies. Distinction is made between outsider theories and accounts of other people knowledge and cultural insiders' ways of theorizing knowledge.

There are different kinds of debates going on, chiefly in the social sciences and humanities, about epistemological issues. Conversations are taking place across discipline borders but in a somewhat fragmentary manner. There is need for more continuous debate.

In the last five years, work in the epistemological field has accelerated. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeos' report on the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project demonstrates how villagers in West Kwara'ae in Malaita, Solomon Islands, are researching on acquisition and validation of knowledge. Their work is prompted by death of older members of their community, by church activities and the market economy that are causing erosion of local way of life. This type of work is complemented by the researches of Manulani Meyer on Hawaiian epistemology, Konai Thaman on curriculum studies in Tonga, and Vilsoni Hereniko's creative study of Rotuman culture. I might add here Larry Thomas plays and films and Teresia Teiawa's poetry and scholarly writing. Similar researches are progress in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the Pacific. The recent issues of *The Contemporary Pacific* of the University of Hawaii have been devoted to Pacific epistemologies, as its

² Ibid pg 57

³ Ibid pg 58

main field of research and announced an international conference on the subject in 2005.

Naturally there are many problems related to research and scholarship by Pacific island scholars. The number of Pacific island scholars is small, and many of them are western-educated, producing similar researches as their Western counter parts. Nearly all of them write only in the English language, their mother tongues have started to languish because of lack of creativity in them. Many Pacific islands writers and academics are bilinguals but they haven't discovered how they can enlarge their sphere of investigation and influence by creating in two languages. The avenues for publication are much better now then two decades ago; the vernacular writers however still have little support. There are few local linguists and even fewer translators. In the year 2000, the education commission that the Fiji Government appointed produced a report that addressed the issues of vernacular languages, local epistemologies, pedagogy, etc. This very substantial report remains another of the country's unread documents.

I have drawn this list of complications, paradoxes, and contradictions in order to draw attention to huge obstacles to the decolonising process in the region. The goal of retrieving, reclaiming local ways of thinking does not have high or equal priority in all parts of the Pacific. Similarly the status of Pacific studies varies significantly in different parts of the region, probably receiving greater importance among Hawaiians and Maoris than Fijians or Tongans and Samoans. In some instances tradition and local cultures are viewed by young Pacific Islanders as obstacles to their personal advancement. The one project that has great support throughout the Pacific is the project of modernization.

Nonetheless Pacific Island writers and scholars are justified in regarding western intellectual traditions as barriers to understanding the contemporary Pacific, specially the claims of universalism that works against minorities and serves the interests of established subject positions, thus reinforcing the structures of domination. Here Edward Said's warning is relevant who says that not many Western intellectuals and theorists are "reliable allies in the resistance to imperialism-on the contrary, one may suspect that they are part of the same "universalism" that connected culture and imperialism for centuries..."⁴

⁴ Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1993, pg 278

An important task for the epistemological project that has been outlined involves confronting and dealing with the confusing, chaotic, contradictory ideas and theories emanating from the west that tend to become entangled with our thinking about our own part of the world. Take the concept of postcolonialism itself; distinction has to be made between the postcolonialism that is simply viewed as the next phase of colonialism and the postcolonialism that includes emancipatory politics. Similarly versions of postmodernism and globalism that obscure vast economic disparities in the world. In view of the great imbalances and inequalities in the Pacific region, there is understable ambivalence towards multiculturalism and pluralism which should not be seen as simple yearning for homogeneity, rather as a strategy of survival in an unequal colonial/ postcolonial situation. The Pacific region is already too diverse, has always been diverse, and cultural homogeneity is neither possible nor desirable. No one believes that our cultures can be restored in their pristine identity. In order to reclaim discourses and to reconstitute an appropriate language that reflects oceanic cosmologies, Pacific islands scholars and researchers need great intellectual flexibility and vitality to negotiate between co-existing cultural practices. Reverse orientalism is as dangerous for Pacific societies as allowing present hegemonic structures to continue. The political logic of diversity is radically different from the logic of homogeneity. There is growing awareness how in the name of cultural nationalism attempts have been made to manipulate the political processes that have caused incalculable damage to the respective societies. The nation state is facing a crisis. It is no longer able to solve problems. Moreover the governing elites are relying more on force than the people to retain control. For democracy to remain effective maximum guarantees have to be provided for ethnic groups and minority rights. The political and cultural well-being of the region will greatly depend on how it copes with multiplicity.

The great challenge for Pacific scholars, intellectuals, artists is to innovate paradigms that would energise Pacific ways of thinking and doing things so that Pacific societies can exist as creative communities among other communities. It is in this context we have to view Pacific scholars' insistence on active involvement of Pacific islanders in Pacific studies programmes, in research and scholarship, in academia and pedagogical work. If our objective is to produce island-oriented histories, epistemologies, and include peoples, languages, narratives that have been silenced or excluded, then they ought to remain in control of projects and maintain the

right to speak for themselves in their own ways. If this implies advocating partisan positions, we have to accept that as such. This does not mean the end of interaction among investigators. Pacific island researchers who are working at the intersection of knowledge systems understand that meaningful conversations across differences, across disciplines must go on. Such collaborations are necessary for assessing divergent claims about knowledge. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeos' dehegemonisation phase of decolonisation must unavoidably include creative collaboration and acting together.

Three years ago I had attempted to define the topology of a collaborative enterprise for Pacific studies focused on epistemological concerns that subsequently received endorsement from a member of Pacific scholars. I would like to restate the kernel point of that proposal. This is what I had said:

“What I propose is the construction of a body of knowledge encompassing the kaleidoscope of Oceanic cultures and tracing diverse and complex forms of knowledge – philosophies, cartographies, language, genealogies and repressed knowledges. Such a mammoth project would blur the usual disciplinary boundaries, including the divisions of oral speech from written materials and of visual imagery from music and performance. And it would juxtapose the popular, commonsensical, and personal with the scientific. Such work would treat Oceania as a complicated, multilayered stage on which island scholars would reinscribe the new epistemologies – their own epistemologies. These would at once involve the critique of oppressive systems of thinking – enlightenment's assumptions about modernization as well as Oceania's patriarchal conventions and invented traditions – and entail an exploration into “Oceania's library” (the knowledge its peoples possess). Such an assignment would be deconstructive and thereby reconstitutive, its task would be to establish a set of problematic rather than to advance any ideological position, grand narratives, or complete theories. The project would avoid dreams of completion, it would allow impurities and accommodate important flaws. In such an arena “literature” could begin

to play its role, for "literature" is a critical site of oceanic imaginary, and this work of reimagining includes the outlines of new epistemologies."⁵

I had argued that such an enterprise would, apart from reorganizing, reviving Pacific knowledge systems, would also produce the authority to interrogate concepts, construct the necessary language of critique, and create the conditions for thinking anew.

Ideally of course communicating in as many Pacific languages as possible will no doubt illuminate areas of experience that have either been marginalized or repressed. The relocation of vernacular language must surely be an integral part of the process of dehegemonisation. It is ironical from the viewpoint of our epistemological quest that a region with one of the largest member of world's languages should continue to conduct its research and scholarship in languages that created and sustained the colonial process.⁶ It is crucial however that the languages that are used to transmit research findings ought to be accessible to a wide range of users-curriculum developers, students, NGO's, politicians, investigators in different fields; it has to be non-technical and jargon-free.

Equally limiting is confining Pacific studies to the humanities and social sciences, or addressing the region's great diversity from the perspective of the single paradigm of established disciplines. In any case, the philosophies in many instances in conventional disciplines are showing signs of exhaustion. Fortunately there is now a general consensus that Pacific studies ought to be examined from a multitude of perspectives using the principles and methodologies of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary studies. That would entail researchers from different fields working together in the same project as well as working from one's area of interest but contributing to each other's discipline. Within multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary studies, methodologies can be developed for comparative study of epistemologies that would also deal with the spaces between knowledges and the issue of convergence of knowledges. The multiparadigmatic approach is most appropriate for dealing with interconnected worlds of Oceania, and moreover it approximates the holistic principles in Pacific cultures.

⁵ Subramani, "The Oceanic Imaginary", *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol 13, No 1, Spring 2001, pg 151

⁶ In response to the problematic situation of Pacific Language, Teresia Teiawa referred to what she saw as a world-wide "language renaissance". Certainly there is much informal discussion, most significantly in Pacific diasporas, on the need to know the mother tongue. Actual evidence of writing in the local language however is almost negligible.

The counter-hegemonic practice that we have identified permits altering the maps of conventional subjects areas, loosening the boundaries of academic disciplines, at the same time incorporating Pacific orality, sciences and cosmologies. Redrawing or shifting the parameters of knowledge is by no means an easy task, and great resistance is to be expected from disciplines that have their own histories and concepts and methodologies. This calls for constructive dialogue among Pacific scholars, regional and inter-regional co-operation and collaboration, and creative re-engagement in the task of seeking alternative visions. The further stage in dehegemonisation in the decolonizing process is this sort of generous collaboration based on the understanding that our experiences are connected, whether we are from the West or the South Pacific, and that the insider/ outsider categories, like the divisions between disciplines, need to be radically re assessed.

I have said that Pacific writing is strategically placed to begin our enquiry from there. In the final segment of this address, I want to comment on Pacific writers as an epistemological community.

Pacific literatures constitute a significant moment in the decolonizing process. Its genesis coincided with the phase of political independence in the region: The obvious functions of literature - ordering the world, making it intelligible, creating new understanding and opportunities for idealism all serve the goals of the projects that we have outlined. The writers have articulated the need to reclaim the region's epistemologies, and in their works made the subalternised peoples the protagonists of written literature. Thus they produced the first significant written counter-narratives to the dominant narratives of colonialism.

In their various writings we saw the realities of personal and private lives, how characters manage to live by their traditional heritage and face threats posed by change and heterogeneity. I would like to suggest that one of the valuable contributions of Pacific literatures is the attempts to represent knowledge in non-imperialist terms by showing how Pacific peoples know and experience the world their daily politics as well as their deeper ontological struggles. Moreover, we have in the works of the writers living accounts of the way various systems – education, commerce bureaucracy – take over human values, and we are given glimpses into life beyond systems where exchange doesn't take place for profit or control. And most significantly, the narratives that aim for multiple perspectives and portray

diversity and difference without aiming for synthesis or closure, keep the questions of freedom and justice and equality open.

As Pacific literatures evolves, the issues of representation will no doubt assume greater prominence with probing into life that has eluded hegemonic narratives – the repressed histories, untranslatable experiences, secrets, routes, holes in historical texts – all that has been distorted and mystified by systems of inclusion and exclusion, and thus the complexity of responses coming from the writing, by being able to transverse plurality of worlds and finally returning to the local, will add to the archive of knowledge, prompt rethinking Pacific studies, and promote the goals of the epistemological projects.

*Have We Been Thinking Upside-Down?
The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific
Theoretical Thought*

Elise Huffer and Ropate Qalo

Pacific thought is like a dormant volcano: as long as it does not erupt, no one notices it. When it does boil to the surface, it comes, to the many who would rather dismiss it, as an unpleasant reminder of its persistent existence.¹ And when it settles again, it is easily forgotten. But we (whether researchers, educators, policymakers, donors, or others) ignore it at our peril.

Why should we be concerned about Pacific thought? Answers to this question are partially provided by the literature that has explored facets of national and local philosophies and epistemologies. Over the past thirty-five years or so, Pacific theologians have examined how Samoan, Kiribati, Tuvaluan, Fijian, Tongan, Papua New Guinean, and other Pacific Islander fundamental concepts and philosophies are linked to the gospel and to Christianity in general in order to make the latter more relevant to their societies.² They have mainly sought to show that, while Christianity cannot survive without integrating existing fundamental values of local societies (even though the Church has a checkered record on this issue),³ there are parallels and meeting points between the two systems of thought as well as areas where one may be enriched by the other.

Pacific educators at the University of the South Pacific (in particular, Konai Helu Thaman, Unaisi Nabobo, Teweiariki Teaero, and 'Ana Maui Taufe'ulungaki) have been conducting research on Pacific educational philosophies.⁴ Their concern has been to affirm the existence of particularly Pacific ways of learning and distinctive understandings of the nature of knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence—and to ensure that these become part of formal educational curricula in the region. Their work has focused

on demonstrating that Tongan, Kiribati, Fijian, and other Pacific Islander values must be integrated in the schooling experience of students in the region, so that the experience is not only more relevant but also conducive to harmonious societies in the future. Similar work has been conducted at the National University of Sāmoa and at the University of Papua New Guinea. Beyond the walls of mainstream academic institutions, people like Motarilavao Hilda Lini in Vanuatu and Ataria Waitea in Kiribati have been active in the development of community schools that, among other activities, teach indigenous philosophy.

In recent years indigenous and “Native Pacific Islander” scholars whose approaches defy narrow disciplinary constraints have begun to investigate Pacific epistemologies and ways of doing and being.⁵ Their work documents and interprets efforts by local communities they are associated with or part of, to validate and explore their own epistemologies and to renegotiate development on their own terms. This is particularly the case for David Welchman Gegeo (1998; and with Karen Watson-Gegeo [2001]); Manulani Aluli Meyer (2001); and Ropate Qalo, who has written a book about a family business run according to Fijian precepts of cooperation and a paper about the relationship between *vakaviti* (the Fijian way) and social capital (Qalo 1997; 1998). The concern of all these scholars is to affirm not only that indigenous epistemologies are alive and well, but also that they are relevant and useful to the societies and people to whom they belong and that they provide alternative ways of approaching economic and social development.

Other attempts at examining aspects of thought in various countries of the Pacific have come from philosophers such as Futa Helu in Tonga, Bernard Narokobi in Papua New Guinea, Jean-Marie Tjibaou in New Caledonia/Kanaky, Turo a Raapato in Tahiti, and John Patterson, author of a book on Māori values (1992).

In spite of the above literature, ignorance or dismissal of Pacific thought prevails in academia, which in turn has impacted on policymaking in Pacific countries. This situation is in part the result of disciplinary biases and omissions.⁶ While anthropologists have looked at many aspects of Pacific societies from a variety of perspectives, they have not sought to examine Pacific thought or systems of thought as a distinct or stand-alone category of study.⁷ In addition, as Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo stated, when “outside researchers, including anthropologists” have examined other cultures, they have done so from their own theoretical constructs, not from those of the societies they have observed (2001, 58). As for political sci-

entists, they have largely focused on institutions, processes, and political forces and events, rather than on the political ideals and views of Pacific peoples and societies. Economists, for the most part, have been so busy promoting "development" and looking for ways to successfully integrate Pacific societies into the world of western economic rationalism that they have come to see Pacific attitudes as a constraint or barrier to their mission rather than as an area to be taken seriously.

While this brief discussion of available literature suggests that there is no constituted body of Pacific thought as such, it does confirm that areas of it have been explored from different perspectives.⁸ Those who have initiated this research recognize a need to give voice to ways of doing, thinking, and being that have been ignored or silenced.⁹ The voices are plural, reflecting the nature of the region. Concepts in one society do not always carry over into another; however, many similarities exist and may be drawn on in building a body of Pacific thought.

Constructing a body of thought, much like building a Samoan *fale* (house), has significance in itself, but it must first and foremost be of use to the community it is designed for. It must provide shelter from the outside elements and bring comfort to those inside. It must not shut out the world but be able to invite the world in, on its own terms. In short, a body of Pacific thought should contribute to the establishment or affirmation of a Pacific philosophy and ethic—a set of applicable concepts and values to guide interaction within countries, within the region, and with the rest of the world. The ethic must be acknowledged, understood, and respected by all who interact with Pacific Island communities.¹⁰

Many within and beyond the region may argue (and have argued) that Pacific values and ways of being and doing are obsolete; that they are not adapted to the demands of the contemporary world with its emphasis on the market economy and liberal democracy.¹¹ The many failures of the market economy and liberal democracy within the region, however, constantly remind us of the importance of Pacific ways and values: one need only look at the coups in Fiji, the crisis in the Solomon Islands, and the corruption prevalent in most countries of the region (engaged in mainly by the elite, those most accustomed to western paradigms and methods). The incapacity within the region (and worldwide) to regulate distribution and ensure equity of wealth, and to provide basic health, education, employment, and sometimes even food security, raises some fundamental questions about value systems that we should begin to answer.

While this task appears daunting, we should remember that the condi-

tion of "modernity" is an exception (albeit a very powerful one), not the norm worldwide (Aglietta et Orléan 1998). Because much of thought production at the international level has digested and assimilated modernity, alternative thought systems have received relatively little attention (with some notable exceptions such as Edward Said and Frantz Fanon).¹²

This is particularly the case in the Pacific, a region very small in terms of population, or of political and economic power, but one of the most culturally diverse per capita in the world. It is also a region in which Christianity has had a very strong impact and where colonial and neocolonial powers have generally assumed that local communities would eventually assimilate the basic principles of the market economy and of liberal democracy, regardless of the destructuring impacts of these precepts.

There are different paths toward constructing Pacific thought. One is to encourage Pacific Islander students and researchers to conduct research in this area with their communities, and to convince donors and academic institutions to fund such research. Offering a course in Pacific thought to graduate students at the University of the South Pacific (an aim of the Institute of Pacific Studies) would promote this kind of research.

A second path is to support local communities that already engage in alternative economic development based on indigenous philosophies and an ethic of self-reliance. Another is for nongovernmental organizations and local leaders to work with communities to establish frameworks and positions based on their value systems, from which they can negotiate with regional, provincial, state, and international actors. All efforts that have already begun in this area should be strengthened.

A more modest path, which we begin to explore in this article, is to analyze some of the existing literature and work already being conducted by and within local communities along these lines, with a view to understanding why and how these efforts came about and where they can lead us.

PACIFIC VALUES AND THEOLOGY

When first looking for written materials on which we could draw to develop a course on Pacific thought, we found that one of the most promising sources available was a body of theses written by theology students (and lecturers) associated mainly with the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Suva, Fiji. This may seem ironic in light of the Church's role in undoing many cultural practices and proselytizing against so-called "primitive" beliefs, but it suggests that, in the long run, mainstream churches in

the Pacific have to an extent been obliged to integrate (or at least to appear to integrate) cultural realities in order to be accepted. Selected theologians have been active in promoting the acknowledgement of Pacific values, and institutions such as Pacific Theological College and the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service in Goroka, Papua New Guinea (and certain principals and researchers within these institutions) have been at the forefront of research into the "contextualization," "indigenization," or even "inculturation" of theology. However, the push has not generally come from the national or local churches or in-country theological colleges: it has been much more of a top-down, academic initiative than a grassroots, practical one. Local churches and national theological colleges have, for the most part, been reluctant to rock the boat by stressing values they do not see as conforming to those of the gospel. The efforts of innovative theologians so far have generally had little impact either on the ground or in a wider "universal" or cross-cultural dialogue,¹³ but they have the merit of existing.

Thus, although Pacific theologians began grappling with the issue of contextualizing the Church some thirty-five years ago, it remains an ongoing project. The need to better integrate western theology and Pacific values has been proclaimed regularly, particularly at the regional level,¹⁴ but, in most cases, there has been little impact on how the gospel and theology are actually taught or brought to the people throughout the region. According to one PTC lecturer, this is due in part to the gap between the institutional level (such as that of PTC and other theological colleges in New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada) and the "base," that is, the people who daily receive the gospel. (In addition, it is difficult to monitor whether and how ideas of contextualization are or may be transmitted by ministers and pastors from regional and overseas institutions after they return to their home country.)

A recent assessment of theology in Papua New Guinea indicates that, far from being over, the mission of contextualization has a long way to go. In an article entitled "Decolonizing Theology: Doing Theology in a Melanesian Context," Henry Paroi has argued that the debate on theology "has to focus more on trying to identify the inevitable link between the Christian or Gospel values and the Melanesian experience of goodness and the values of the here and now" (2001, 21). Furthermore, theology and Christianity will have no place in people's lives unless they acknowledge Melanesian values: "The rational thinking of Melanesians and how they work and live and experience their life have to be the basis from which theology

can flow. Melanesian theology has to have its basis in Melanesian identity and Melanesian experience of life" (Paroi 2001, 29). This line of argument implies that while Melanesians practice Christianity in their own ways and within their own particular contexts, this is not yet fully acknowledged by or integrated within western theology, and that the innovative Pacific theologians striving for a greater acceptance of Pacific values face a challenging road.

The ambivalence of organized Christianity toward the context in which it operates was also raised by Lalomilo Kamu in his doctoral thesis, "The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel" (published in 1996). In his introduction, Kamu wrote: "Christianity appears in some ways to be against culture or areas of life associated with the *faaSamoa* while in other ways it supports the culture. The Church, while existing in the same world as culture, fails to appreciate the cultural contributions to the communication of the Gospel in Samoa" (1996, 2).

Based on both Paroi's and Kamu's comments, we can safely state that even though the issue of contextualization—acknowledging indigenous cultural values and their relevance to (in this case) theology and the application of the gospel—is far from being resolved, at least a debate has been initiated, and it is one in which the voices of Pacific Islanders come through clearly.¹⁵ While there are many more Pacific Islander theologians than Pacific Islander social or human scientists, it does not mean that the example set by the theologians cannot be emulated in other areas, particularly in politics and economics.

So what can we learn from the theological literature, and how can it help us begin building a body of Pacific thought and an ensuing Pacific ethic? To try to cover all the theological material available would be a mammoth task, but we can look at selected theses and articles and extrapolate from them. Within this literature we can seek out (1) useful directions for the affirmation of contemporary indigenous concepts and the building of a Pacific philosophy, and (2) areas of accommodation or possible dialogue between foreign or universal influences and local values.¹⁶ Following this we can return to the problems of application the theologians have come across and see where the stumbling blocks lie.

Lessons from Wisdom in Sāmoa

In his 1982 bachelor of divinity thesis, entitled "Wisdom in the Samoan Context with Special Reference to the *Matai* System: A Theological Interpretation," Faauuga Logovae examined the various components that make

up the Samoan conceptualization of wisdom, namely *tofa*, *moe*, and *fa'autaga*.¹⁷ He began by looking at the different meanings of the word *tofa* (for instance, good-bye, nighttime, a courteous word for sleep, a term used when addressing an orator (ie, talking chief), or the most important 'ie *tōga* (fine mat) received by an *ali'i* (chief), all of which are related to wisdom. Of particular interest is Logovae's explanation that, for Samoans, the mere "presence" of an orator is a sign of his or her "prudence" (ie, his *tofa*), implying that holding such a leadership position has certain obligations attached to it, including the duty to think things over carefully and exercise judgment and caution.

Logovae concluded that *tofa* is a chiefly concept because: "*Tofa* is more than the knowledge acquired by a person. . . . [It is] the result of many years of observation, gathering, scrutinizing, developing, improving and analysing of culture. . . . [The chief] observes and acquires from what is provided by nature; he also acquires from what is available in tradition and history" (1982, 5-6). The criteria thus established for leadership are of a very high standard. According to this analysis of *tofa*, a leader must be able to analyze, reflect, understand his or her environment, and translate all that into a "presence."

Associated with *tofa* is the concept of *moe*. *Moe* signifies a high degree of humility and service: it is a humble way of referring to sleep and also alludes to working on the farm or garden (because gardens are sometimes far from the village, it is more efficient to stay there in order to start farming early in the morning before the sun gets too hot). By implication, *moe* means that one looks after the family. As Logovae put it: "[The] emphasis is on having enough food for the family to enable them to live well. The Samoan wisdom presupposes that the person must live well" (9).

Moe is also the term used to describe the "wealth of knowledge" of the orator (1982, 9).¹⁸ But when the orator enters into relations with other *matai* (title-holders), "his" *moe* is transformed into *fa'autaga*. Logovae explained that *fa'autaga* is made up of three words: *fa'a*, *uta*, and *ga*, which when combined imply the following:¹⁹

- that wisdom is a burden and an obligation for those who assume it (*uta* means load);
- that wisdom is "shrewdness" and the ability to "consider [things] carefully," to have "sagacious and sharp insights," to be "clever or sharp in practical affairs";
- that wisdom is "deeply imbedded in land" (*uta* means landward—it can

refer either to the village or to where the land or forest is, depending on where the speaker is positioned); and that wisdom is both a gift from the land and a burden so that “though [it is] a privilege, responsibilities are its constant companion.” (13, 15)

As Logovae noted, wisdom is a practical concept: the orator’s role is not to distance himself from his people but to serve them with his *fa’autaga*. But it also has an ontological dimension in that it is a gift already present and “embedded” in the land.

Although Logovae’s motivation for explaining the different facets of Samoan wisdom is essentially theological, his presentation contributes to our discussion in the following ways:

- it demonstrates the existence of a sophisticated and integrated philosophy of wisdom and service;
- it defines expectations of leadership that are relevant to and applicable in the contemporary context, and
- it promotes a view of service that neglects no one and focuses on the well-being of all.

The values highlighted by Logovae are ideals (as are all values) that can and should be used in developing a Pacific-wide philosophy and ethic, and promoted in formal and informal education programs. Who uncovers or brings these concepts to light (ie, theologians or others) is less important than that the concepts be taken into consideration.²⁰ The values should also be part of “contextualized” codes of conduct and ethics, laws, and other documents currently being considered in the Pacific. Why? Simply because they are powerfully relevant to Pacific societies (in this case particularly to Sāmoa) as homegrown concepts that people understand and that have been part of their culture and language for many years. Using concepts understood by people at all levels of society will help make leaders more accountable. While terms such as good governance, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, development, and so on are largely seen as impositions from outside and are seldom understood, long-standing local concepts embody ideals of social justice, welfare for all, service for the people, and other values in ways that make sense to and empower local people.

Examining the Vanua

In his book *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, Ilaitia Tuwere has argued that for the “mission of the church in Fiji . . . a proper understanding of the Fijian’s concept of the *vanua* or land is now crucial” (2002, 71).²¹ One might take this statement one step further by insisting that understanding the concept of *vanua* is crucial not just for the Church but for all institutions, decision makers, and citizens of Fiji, and for all those who interact with Fiji (donors, nongovernmental organizations, multilateral institutions, etc).

Tuwere’s work examines key components of the *vanua*: the *matanivanua* (herald; literally, the eye or face of the land), *mana* (power), *vakanomodi* (silence), and *vakarorogo* or *veirogorogoci* (listening [to each other]). As explained by Tuwere, the role of the *matanivanua* is much more complex than that of a simple spokesman. He is a “mediator” who “sets in motion the principle of ‘relationship’ or relatedness. . . . He speaks and listens, represents, reconciles, mends broken relationships, negotiates, introduces, announces and so on. Because of this rather alarming list, a *matanivanua* must know his *vanua* inside out” (2002, 72).

When reading this impressive array of responsibilities one cannot help but think: Where are the *matanivanua*, and why aren’t they at the forefront of regulating Fijian society? Why hasn’t the idea of a mediator of society—that is, someone who sees society, represents it, and acts as a communal link: “the word *mata* literally means eye, face, presence” (Tuwere 2002, 83)—permeated into contemporary Fiji at the national level? There are no doubt many very practical answers to this; for example, one is only a *matanivanua* in one’s own area, so the role cannot be a national one; or, *matanivanua* is a traditional institution that was not designed to deal with modern Fiji. However, what we are dealing with here is not just an institution but a concept. As a concept, it can be transformed, enhanced, and reapplied to a context that has also evolved, bringing new tensions and conflicts in its wake. One of the main reasons the idea of the *matanivanua* has not been transposed is that it has not yet been allowed to become part of mainstream discourse in Fiji. Most people in the country, particularly within the substantial non-Fijian population, know little about the concept of *matanivanua*. In addition, many power-brokers in Fiji and beyond would probably prefer that such an idea not become part of a national dialogue because it could erode the advantages they currently enjoy. And yet through the words of Opeteia Dreketirua,

we can see how beneficial the idea of the *matanivanua* would be to contemporary society: “[The *matanivanua*] are the chords of the land (*wa ni vanua*) binding together the people and their leaders. They press down (*bika*) and hide within their own hearts the angry words of the chiefs about the people, and they hide also in their hearts the angry words of the people about the chiefs; and for this reason they are called the ‘Stomach of Evil’ (*ketē ni ka ca*) for their first responsibility is to preserve the land from weakness of destruction through dissension” (quoted in Tuwere 2002, 83).

Another useful concept raised by Tuwere about the way of the land (*vakavanua*) is that of “lying straight”: “the way of the *vanua* is *davo donu* (lit, to lie straight)—that is, if all live justly and peacefully with one another, with the ancestors, with God and with nature—the land would be filled with *sautu* (well-being)” (130). In contrast, *davo cala* (to lie in a crooked way) would bring disaster to the land and to the people. Both these ideas are extremely relevant to the idea of governance (and no more or less a Manichean opposition than good versus bad governance) but are richly evocative and easy to understand. They also reinforce the idea that Fijian society understands what is necessary for its well-being and does not depend on “lesson givers” from outside. These values, related to the way of the land, must now make their way into national consciousness and into the arenas of formal education, political and financial institutions, the workplace, and so on.

Tuwere’s discussion of *mana* (a term found throughout most of the Pacific) teaches us that although it is a term closely related to the supernatural, it is also “a success or achievement oriented concept” as well as “a creative art” in that it denotes the ability to create (139). Those endowed with *mana* are expected to demonstrate *i tovo vakaturaga*—“chiefly qualities” (138). Many contemporary chiefs lack these attributes, however. In the past, such a lack of *mana* would have resulted in “the rule of the club,” but today “people merely grumble and speculate” (138). This inability to react is largely due to the changed conditions for succession to chieftainship: “Succession is now decided by accident of birth, determined by what is there legally in the *I Vola ni Kawa Bula* or official records of members of every *yavusa* [the largest social unit, incorporating several clans or *mataqali*] kept by NLC [Native Lands Commission] in Suva” (138). Examining Fijian institutions in the context of these values may be one way to reevaluate their usefulness and relevance to the people they are serving. Teaching through both the formal and informal systems about

ideas such as *mana* and *i tovo vakaturaga* at a level beyond the superficial would provide children and adults in Fiji with firm grounding in what is expected in their society, and what they should be able to expect from others. The creativity inherent in the idea of *mana* could also serve as a model, encouraging confidence and initiative to develop new skills and foster new ideas.

The other components of *vanua* discussed by Tuwere are *vakanomodī* (silence) and *vakarorogo* or *veirogorogoci* (listening [to each other]), which interact with *vosa* (the word, speaking). Within Fijian society, “every *vosa* uttered is meant to be heard, to be listened to” (173)—and not just in the ceremonial context, though that is where it is most clearly demonstrated. “It belongs to the nature of the *vanua* to *vakatūdaliga* [to make the ears stand] when a *vosa* is given. . . . The capacity to allow oneself to hear the other is known as *veirogoci* and making allowances for others is *veivosoti*” (173–174). All of these components point up different aspects of the key *vanua* concept: one is that it “provides the governing principle in the ordering of life in the community” (173); another is that it evokes a large dose of humanitarianism, selflessness, and humility; and a third is that it is “intrinsic to community building” (175). A large part of learning is dependent on the ability to hear what the other has to say, and a large part of understanding the other is dependent on listening to them.

Tuwere is concerned with building bridges between communities in Fiji. As he sees it, “The task is to identify new modes of discernment that will permit another reading of the speaking-hearing experience of the *vanua* in a multi-cultural context. The experience that has proved constructive and useful in the past must re-define itself in a new situation” (175). It is hard to disagree with Tuwere on this point. But if these values are to be upheld, they must be understood and promoted until they permeate all of society. The virtues of *veirogoci* and *veivosoti*—really hearing and making allowances for others—must be openly explained and assimilated, not maintained in obscurity and allowed to remain marginal or, even worse, considered obsolete.

Future Directions

Our brief examination of Logovae’s and Tuwere’s theses seeks to demonstrate that the values or elements of local philosophies they highlight, are not only relevant for contextualizing theology but also significant for understanding contemporary Samoan and Fijian society. Their work

shows that far from being archaic, these concepts remain embedded in the Samoan and Fijian cultures, even though they have yet to enter the arena of "universal dialogue."²² The challenge for researchers and educators (here we mean all who are involved in the process of teaching and training in any context) is to highlight and mainstream these ideas and values so that they are understood, integrated, and "recycled" into a body of thought from which a strong negotiating stance can be developed.

Not all Pacific ideals or ways of being are appealing or beneficial to contemporary society, but they must be allowed to be brought to the fore, discussed, and understood. Those that fit in with Pacific peoples' contemporary notions of well-being, health, and security should be promoted, if only for the practical purposes of avoiding civil conflict and its associated costs. It is wasteful for international and regional organizations, bilateral and multilateral funding sources, nongovernmental organizations, and national governments (and taxpayers) to spend millions of dollars trying to "clean up" devastated societies after the fact, when common sense dictates allowing those societies the time and opportunity to articulate their own approaches to the world and its multitude of developments. Many will argue that this is a luxury for which the modern world does not allow time. But if we in the Pacific do not take time, we will continue to suffer from the "maldevelopment" that is presently affecting the region, as highlighted in the many reports issued by UN agencies, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and regional organizations. We need to take stock now and to listen to the voices that have remained silent for so many years. Various Pacific theologians have much to say about this, and we should enter into a prolonged dialogue with them (not as representatives of the Church but as contemporary thinkers), as should the donors and others who influence the Pacific.

The role of imaginative Pacific theologians—many can be considered the equivalent of philosophers in more secular societies—must be allowed to go beyond matters of the Church. While the media and others have sought out Tuwere's opinion about public events in Fiji, they have not consulted him in his capacity of theologian/philosopher but rather in his institutional role as president of the Methodist Church. As a high-level church representative, Tuwere may have been limited by institutional constraints. But as a free-thinking theologian, Tuwere offers a probing and enlightening discourse, which does not necessarily reflect the opinions or actions of his church hierarchy. Yet little value is currently placed on seeking out the ideas and thoughts of Pacific theologians like Tuwere, Logovae, and the

late Kamu (many of whom could almost be considered dissidents in the sense that they critique the role of the Church) and other philosophers in the region who have spent time reflecting on their cultures' values and ways of being and doing.

Debates on public matters in the region remain very superficial. Rarely is public space made available for substantive philosophical and ethical discussion (exceptions have been a column in the Fijian language weekly *Volasiga* made available to Ropate Qalo to discuss Fijian rationality and related issues; the debate in Papua New Guinea on the "Melanesian Way" and Bernard Narokobi's influence in politics and law; the role played by Aiono Fana'afi in Sāmoa, etc). Policy is seldom widely debated at a public level. Local television programs are often mere propaganda tools. Instead they should offer stimulating public discussion about current issues in which local and national philosophies and views could be revealed and investigated. The ways of the land and the experiences and knowledge of rural and urban communities are subjects scarcely ever deemed worthy of in-depth media examination (beyond the shallow weekly columns such as "Countrywide" in the *Fiji Times*, in which young, urban-based journalists describe their one-day experience of village life—although this is perhaps better than nothing). Rather than being confined to academic discussion within theological colleges, ideas put forward by innovative theologians should be widely displayed in the media so that they can become part of the national debate and contribute to alternative ways of dealing with issues.

Let us turn now to the work of selected Pacific educators.

PACIFIC VALUES AND EDUCATION

In the 2002 publication *Tree of Opportunity: Re-thinking Pacific Education*, which resulted from an April 2001 colloquium held at the University of the South Pacific, regional educators argued for the urgent need to transform education so that it integrates Pacific values, ways of learning, and attitudes to knowledge. In her contribution, Unaisi Nabobo suggested that Pacific educators must "redefine paradigms of thoughts and explore Pacific worldviews and then take cognizance of these in formal education" (2002, 45). She concluded, "The coconut tree must be allowed to live with the computer tiger" (45), that is, the knowledge symbolized by the coconut tree with its multitude of uses, which considerably enrich the community, must not be discarded in favor of technological, economics-driven,

and individualized or commodified knowledge. Nabobo's views are echoed throughout the volume by the many contributors who are only too aware of the disconnected worlds in which most Pacific Islands students interact;²³ of the limited opportunities for formal education available to most young people in the region (only 5 percent reach the tertiary level); and of the growing inequalities and lack of political direction in many of the countries of the region.

One of the ways Nabobo and other Pacific educators have been trying to enhance the integration of values in the curriculum has been to conduct research and promote knowledge about indigenous understandings of education, learning, and wisdom. A number of readings in an edited collection for a second-year USP course on "Theories and Ideas in Education" examine indigenous educational concepts and theories of knowledge and wisdom (Thaman ed 2003). All present similar outcomes: whether in Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, or elsewhere, there are sophisticated theoretical indigenous constructs about learning and education. The contributions by Thaman, Nabobo, and Teaero describe what constitutes the highest and most virtuous form of knowledge in their respective countries. All of them agree that this form of intelligence, which translates loosely into wisdom, is not just accumulated knowledge. In Tonga, "*poto* may be defined as the positive application of *'ilo* (knowledge and understanding). . . . Someone who is not *poto* is *vale*—one who does not apply *'ilo* (with negative or detrimental results). *'Ilo* is therefore a precondition of *poto* but only through its positive application can one become *poto*" (Thaman 2003, 77). Similarly in Fiji, the idea of *yalomatua* (*yalo* = soul/mentality; *matua* = wise/mature) reflects the importance of using knowledge for the spiritual, moral, physical, and economic enhancement of oneself and others (Nabobo 2003). The concept of *wanawana* (the highest level of knowledge) in Kiribati also captures the importance of using what one has learnt in a judicious way for the rest of society. Quoting Taomati Naki-bae, one of his informants, Teaero wrote: "A person who is *wanawana* is highly cultured and shows it in how he [*sic*] lives and behaves toward others. A person who is clever and very knowledgeable comes to nought if he doesn't practise his culture" (2003, 113).

The readings also highlight that though these concepts of wisdom remain core values in Pacific societies, they are sidelined in the education system. As Thaman argued, "For over one hundred years, we . . . have promoted (or at least accepted) [a] view of education . . . that is diametrically opposed to our traditional notions of *ako* [learning and teaching], *'ilo*

and *poto*" (1995, 731). One can say the same for all Pacific Island countries where formal curricula at best ignore and at worst denigrate fundamental principles and notions of indigenous education. That these principles have only begun to be explored in the past thirty years or so points to the weight of the colonizer in education as in other areas of public life.²⁴

The concerns raised by Pacific educators come in the face of the consistent failure of the schooling system to produce harmonious, stable, and equitable societies despite large budgetary spending on education and extensive reforms funded by both donors and Pacific countries themselves (Taufe'ulungaki 2002). The educators are arguing for a reassessment of the purpose of education in the region and for measures to reintroduce Pacific values, beliefs, and worldviews as part of what students learn. One example of this at the tertiary level is the "Theories and Ideas in Education" course mentioned earlier, which is required for obtaining a BA in Education and for the BEd (Secondary). This course, taught by Konai Helu Thaman, focuses in large part on indigenous educational "aims, processes, content, methods and assessment" (Thaman 2000, 5).²⁵ Other USP education courses also investigate the values, beliefs, and knowledge systems of Pacific societies.

A related initiative is "the series of modules which have been developed in response to a need to assist teacher educators in the USP region [to] better contextualise their teaching" (Thaman 2000, i).²⁶ Module 5 in the series, which looks at "Ways of Mathematizing in Fijian Society," shows how sixth and seventh form Fijian students fail in mathematics in large part because Fijian concepts and values related to mathematics are ignored, and what the students are taught is culturally foreign (Bakalevu 2001). The module provides a brief overview of Fijian notions of counting and measuring, and some of the basic principles of the traditional economy, which not only give us insight into the mathematical worldview of Fijians, but also demonstrate how different these concepts are from western mathematical constructs. Understanding these differences and learning about Fijian mathematizing is not only enriching intellectually (and therefore valuable in itself) but it is essential if we are to remedy some of the problems encountered in the classroom and in Fijian society generally. One might even want to suggest that development officers and bankers in Fiji adjust their policies and methods to these concepts if they are serious about promoting the people's economic and financial well-being.

Another module argues that colleges of education in the region should

take the lead in conducting research on and in studying indigenous leadership, "because leadership is likely to be one of the main issues Pacific Island countries will continue to deal with in the years ahead" (Sanga 2000, 7). The view of the author, Kabini Sanga, is that when teaching about modern state elections, teacher educators should also discuss indigenous ways of choosing leaders. Incorporating indigenous notions of governance in the curricula "may help us to understand how to reconceptualize leadership in our schools so that [it] reflect[s] both the indigenous culture as well as modern day realities" (8). Sanga's conclusion presents a list of twenty-one areas within the topic of indigenous leadership to be researched by teacher educators and trainees. It is important that Sanga's suggestions are taken up, as leadership is already one of the main issues faced by Pacific countries. Leadership boundaries are not clear, nor are people's expectations of their leaders. Indigenous codes of conduct have been put aside while foreign ones are not applicable for many reasons. Indigenous values and principles relating to leadership have been ignored in national politics, and, increasingly, at the local level as well. Because they haven't been promoted, advanced, and publicized, they risk being left out of the debate altogether.

Furthermore, Sanga's call for teacher educators and trainers to look closely at indigenous leadership shows how important their role in reforming society can be. Teachers, like theologians and philosophers, should figure more prominently in public affairs throughout the region. We generally hear about teachers only when they are having their annual general assemblies or when they are unhappy about working conditions. Yet in the region, they constitute an important sector of an intellectually privileged minority. They should be at the forefront of promoting Pacific thought and values and should assume a public role in line with their status and with the heavy social responsibility they bear.

Building the Edifice

The work of the Pacific educators discussed here relates closely to that of Pacific theologians, philosophers, and other scholars who are concerned with contextualization and with the affirmation of Pacific thought, knowledge, values, and so on. Although they approach the issue from different academic directions, they are not only pleading the same cause but also reaching similar conclusions. The concepts they bring to the fore are applicable to all the fields they represent. This is not surprising since Pacific concepts are, by their nature, globalizing (to avoid the overused

term holistic) and not simply theological, educational, sociological, economic, or political. Because Pacific philosophies are based on relationships and interconnectedness, fundamental concepts cover a whole range of areas of life, beliefs, and ways of doing and being. Although there are differences among communities, islands, and countries, many of the philosophical ideas are similar.

An example of this is the notion of silence, highlighted in both Tuwera's discussion of *vanua* in Fiji (discussed earlier at some length) and in Teaero's analysis of indigenous education in Kiribati. According to the latter: "In the Kiribati worldview, there is dignity in diligence, humility and virtue. These are demonstrated in operational terms through silence. . . . Silence, in the Kiribati education context, can speak volumes and must be listened to. It takes a trained and culturally sensitive ear to "hear" and appreciate what this silence says or demonstrates" (Teaero 2003, 108-109). The emphasis on hearing in both Fiji and Kiribati is closely linked to the idea of social interdependence, in which all members of society are considered important and none should be left aside. It is also strongly related to the ability to understand and memorize what is important to society, and to be able to transmit it faithfully. Additionally, the ability to "hear" allows for communion with the world, particularly with its supernatural component, but also with its living members. Those who "hear" are more attuned with what is going on and can better detect upcoming problems. Those who enjoy the sound of their own voices are less likely to hear those of others.

Another example of commonality across cultures is found in Nabobo's reflection on the Fijian concept of *yalomatua*, in which she draws parallels with Logovae's assessment of wisdom in Sāmoa (Nabobo 2003). The concept of wisdom in both these societies is similar whether one approaches it from the perspective of the educator or of the theologian. It is also a concept that can be used across the board, in governance, economics, or education, because it underpins Fijians' and Samoans' understandings of socially appropriate and desirable behavior.

These similarities all demonstrate that Pacific philosophy, as a body of thought, permeates every area of life (including the afterlife) and defies disciplinary boundaries. And despite recognizable local and regional differences in concepts and in terminology, the many commonalities point to the potential for a coherent regional philosophical construct. Building the edifice requires conducting much more interdisciplinary research and listening to the practitioners of indigenous philosophies throughout the region.

In our next section, we examine various examples of Pacific philosophy in action.

TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS:
PACIFIC COMMUNITIES, DEVELOPMENT, AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Various communities throughout the Pacific have been active in promoting indigenous philosophies, but they generally have a low profile. One example of such an initiative is the TuVanuatu Kominiti, a “national movement” established out of frustration with Vanuatu’s constitutional emphasis on British and French values and institutions, and its inability to promote self-sustaining socioeconomic development in spite of the country’s formal independence.²⁷ The two main activities of this movement are its bank—which deals in “pigs, mats, kava, shell money or national currency” and allows people to save as well as borrow—and its Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology (*PNB* 1998, 7). The bank began as a community venture in 1986, expanded to the whole of Pentecost Island by 1993, and opened a national branch in Port Vila in 1996. Hilda Lini said that when in 1998 “there was a problem with the provident bank [Vanuatu National Provident Fund], people withdrew their contribution and invested it in the indigenous bank” (quoted in *PNB* 1998, 7). The bank issues many small loans and allows people who cannot get credit with commercial banks to borrow to set up small businesses, pay for school fees, and so on.

The Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology was set up on Pentecost in 1997 but caters to students from throughout Vanuatu. According to Hilda Lini, it teaches self-reliance, instructing students to grow crops, look after domestic animals, fish, build houses, and so on, using community practices, knowledge, and skills. The schooling has six levels, the first two of which (for ages 0–6 and 6–12) are carried out in the home and in the village *nakamal*, respectively. Students age 16 to 20 can specialize in areas such as “economy, banking, administration, to be a chief dealing with justice.” Beyond stage four, the focus is on “leadership of the highest standard.” Theoretical instruction is carried out in the evenings, thus respecting the indigenous timetable of evening storytelling. The students also learn indigenous writing, “a writing that was used by our ancestors” and that has been further developed by the chief responsible for initiating TuVanuatu Kominiti with Hilda Lini (*PNB* 1998, 13–14).²⁸

The central aim of both the bank and the institute is to strengthen the

community at all levels ("family, village, district, area, nation") by giving people a sense of purpose-based on values they understand and respect. The by-products are increased self-esteem, initiative, social stability, security, and the ability to set goals. Such community groups may be seen as marginal (if not subversive) in the context of national politics and policy-making, and yet they provide an alternative to the critical situations some of the countries of the region are facing at the national level.

"Doing Indigenous Epistemology"

Another local community initiative, in the Solomon Islands, is documented in the article "'How We Know': Kwara'ae Rural Villagers Doing Epistemology" (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001). The Kwara'ae Genealogy Project (KGP) was initiated by a community group in West Kwara'ae in 1994 to research and write Kwara'ae culture, language, and history on their own terms (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001, 66). That project, like the TuVanuatu Kominiti movement, came about in response to maldevelopment, and to the fast pace of the often negative changes occurring in that area.

Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo's discussion of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project explains Kwara'ae "epistemological strategies," that is, the methods the Kwara'ae use to uncover knowledge. Examples are encapsulated in the concepts of *abira'anga* and *saefilongisi(a)*. The first, which means to branch out, describes an approach to knowledge that follows sprouts: "As each topic or issue *birabira* 'sprouts into new shoots', then a closely related sprout or branch (*birabira ru*) can be followed via *abira'anga*." *Saefilongisi(a)*, which means "to question (it) to pieces," "connotes the knowledge that a larger idea or point is made up of small pieces or parts. . . . [and that] arriving at the conclusion, answer, or understanding of something involves everyone's knowledge and does not reside with a single person" (70-71). These two examples (out of many more) indicate the Kwara'ae's intricate approach to knowledge. They also put to rest any notions that indigenous knowledge, or thinking about knowledge, is obsolete or static. They demonstrate the Kwara'ae's attachment to active and deliberate construction of knowledge, not only as a way of maintaining and enhancing cultural ways of doing and being, but also as a means of reinforcing a sense of responsibility and self-sufficiency in the community. Discussing the attitudes of participants in the project, the authors wrote, "project members spoke of how up to this point, cultural knowledge had been passed down orally, and it was unclear to them how it was constructed.

Now they feel they are in the place of the elders, and they must be, as they are the generation to continue the knowledge and to continue to construct it. They have come to the acceptance of this responsibility as indigenous epistemologists" (76).

The Kwara'ae community is rebuilding what is theirs in a new light,²⁹ one that belongs to them and uses contemporary strategies and techniques.³⁰ The testimony of KGP participants demonstrates that although doing indigenous epistemology is "difficult work" because of both the time spent and the nature of the exercise, it is invaluable in helping rebuild individual and community confidence and in better addressing and solving community problems and disputes. One of the participants quoted by Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo is an elected *kastom* chief who, referring to his role in judging land cases in court, stated: "It's not only what we have done in the project, however, that has made me think more deeply. It's the confidence I've gained and the respect for traditional knowledge—that our strategies for argumentation are just as important if not more important than those of whiteman's schooling. I see other chiefs arguing in local courts along the lines of whiteman's law and ways of thinking. They cannot do it, and it only leads to confusion and passing judgments that are unfair. I see now that outsiders' ways of reasoning and whiteman's law won't fit our oral traditions of land" (78).

Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo's analysis of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project highlights many important Kwara'ae concepts, which underpin their approach to understanding the world and to conducting research. Many of these have strong parallels with those brought up by other scholars researching indigenous methodologies and values. In addition, the Kwara'ae concepts have a strong aesthetic quality because they are closely tied to the senses, unlike many western philosophical concepts, which have become much more disconnected from both the subject and the senses.³¹ Examples of strong Kwara'ae imagery are concepts such as *manata afe'ara'ara* (mind that flows like a river or stream) to describe "a truly knowledgeable person," in opposition to *olioli'a* (whirlpool, that is, "repetitious and circling nowhere") to describe "a pretending but less knowledgeable person" (76).

The aesthetic quality of language and concepts throughout the region are consistent with worldviews that emphasize globalizing qualities. This is reflected, for instance, with the Kwara'ae's understanding of the "good life (*mauri'a le'a*)" in which "wholeness or completeness (*ali'afu'anga*)" is stressed and where development that does not focus on "the whole per-

son (*ngwae ali'afu*)" is neither desirable nor appropriate (2001, 61, 62).³² Similar notions are found throughout the region and are the building blocks to a Pacific wide ethic that must be better understood and publicized so that it becomes part of the national agenda of Oceanian societies.

"Glocal" Episteme, Development, and Politics: A Fijian Example

In the quest for appropriate development that would be beneficial to all its members, the Mucunabitu family established the Mucunabitu Iron Works Cooperative Society (MIW) using the Fijian conceptualization of the "good life" while integrating modern management principles (Qalo 1997). The success of the cooperative, which began with a *solu* (ceremonial contribution) of F\$20 from each of the sixteen subclan members and has grown consistently since its inception, defies Spate's ridiculing of the Fijian Way or *vakaviti* in his influential 1959 report on the economic and social problems of Fijians.³³ It shows that, contrary to received truths, Fijian philosophy is not antithetical to development. It provides the example of a Fijian business using two sets of values intelligently (ie, those aspects that fit together to achieve the group's goals), in creating a "glocal episteme," or set of global-local discursive practices. The Mucunabitu Iron Works is not a perfect business; it has many management flaws, but it has avoided two downfalls common in Fiji. The first is the tendency by indigenous businesses to ignore management techniques only to struggle and eventually perish. The other is to ignore the *vakaviti* to the extent of becoming exploitative and "un-Fijian."

The dilemma for many ethnic Fijians, in business and politics, has been to deal with (mainly) foreigners who have consistently attempted to water down or ignore Fijian knowledge on which the former base their very existence. To Fijians, this is "upside-down thinking," which they have had to tolerate for almost a century. And although ethnic Fijians have dominated political power since their country's independence in 1970, it has become clear that they have had difficulty working with the prevailing knowledge paradigms from outside. The lack of a middle ground (in the form of a glocal episteme) has led the majority of Fijians to deal with others based on their own rational world and to insist on political dominance. The instability of the parliamentary system in Fiji is in many ways akin to the collapse of the F\$50–60 million Uluisaivou and Yalavou cattle schemes funded by New Zealand and Australia (and the abandoned French-funded Yaqara and American funded-Viticorp schemes): none of them hold much meaning in Fijian conceptualizations of governance and development.

Vakaviti should be viewed as social capital (Qalo 1998), as it has proven to be in the MIW case. In it are contained the following concepts, all of which enhance the common good more than the self-interest that is common among many of us who call ourselves Pacific Islanders:

veilomani (genuine concern for one another)

veikauwaitaki (caring and expressing concern for the well-being of others)

veivakaliuci (placing others ahead of oneself, supporting or looking up to them)

veidokai (honoring, respecting, and upholding someone)

Obviously much needs to be done to convince development gurus and die-hard capitalists to replace the economics of fear based on supply, demand, and scarcity in our present mind-set, and allow greater space for *vakaviti* and similar Pacific concepts, which are based on trust and respect.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have sought to bring together some of the different facets of Pacific thought that have been explored in academia and beyond. The examples cited demonstrate that although Pacific values and worldviews remain vibrant and relevant throughout the region, they are underpublicized. The lack of a coherent voice to promote Pacific thought or philosophy means that it is discounted, particularly when it comes to policy-making. Although there are many local institutions that are (partially) derived from local customs, they have so far failed to adequately promote Pacific life principles.

Constructing a coherent body of Pacific thought does not imply standardizing or reducing Pacific concepts but rather bringing them together to find common traits. Our discussion here shows that many similarities exist. By demonstrating that there is a shared and coherent philosophy and ethic, we can “force” it onto the public agenda.

In the material we have covered, two elements stand out. First is the awareness among growing numbers of Pacific academics of the need for a genuine and far-reaching contextualization—acknowledging the relevance and applicability of indigenous cultural values in contemporary settings. Second is the success of communities whose initiatives have followed the ways they know and understand, reaping many rewards. Looking

around the region we find many development and governance failures. The national state of affairs in many countries is not encouraging. Where good development and governance are occurring, it is usually through the direct initiative of local communities using their knowledge base. These indigenous knowledge bases must be better understood and made nationally accessible so that more can benefit. To achieve this requires a great deal more theoretical and action research into Pacific values and world-views. Ultimately it means listening to the communities around us and giving them a chance to express their understandings of the world.

Notes

1 By using the term "emergence" in the title of this article, we are not suggesting that Pacific thought is new, only that it is gradually making its way into formal academic settings. While Pacific thought has formed the basis of communal living in the Pacific for many years, it has not generally been accepted in modern discourse and institutions. Because Pacific philosophies have been transmitted orally in vernacular languages, the dominant institutions and actors in the colonial and postcolonial Pacific have ignored them. This is finally changing, thanks to all the Pacific scholars and practitioners who have been advocating Pacific thought.

2 Efforts to better understand and integrate local values into the work of missionaries began in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s within the Catholic Church, in particular at the Holy Spirit Seminary. In 1968 the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service was established by the Association of Clerical Religious Superiors of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea in order to help missionaries better understand the cultures they were evangelizing. The missionaries at the forefront of this initiative "were aware that their own training had been mainly concerned with the seed and with the sower, but very little with the field" (*Catalyst* 1991, 7). The Melanesian Institute became a "joint ecumenical venture" among the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church, and the United Church from 1971. The institute's symbol, a snake wrapped around the cross, was chosen because "the snake, frequently humanised, is a group representation of everlasting life in Melanesian cultures. The cross . . . is the symbol of the fullness of Christian life. . . . The enclosure of the two figures within the unbroken circle expresses the hope and the goal that the traditional religious concepts proper to Melanesia will one day be truly synthesised with the message of Christ" (*Catalyst* 1991, 11). Three Melanesian Institute publications—its journal, *Catalyst*, its yearly publication entitled *Point*, and

its magazine *Umben*—all explore relationships between theology and Melanesian values and examine current issues in Papua New Guinean society.

3 Many of these theologians highlight the historical intolerance of the Church. For instance, Henry Paroi wrote, “[The] Christianity that was imparted to our ancestors . . . was wounded by evils of intolerance, curse, hatred and division. This historical baggage was handed to our ancestors. . . . They were taught to have nothing to do with [other denominations], they were taught not to marry their men and women thus disrupting traditional values that linked clans and families through marriage” (2001, 27).

4 Other Pacific educators working in the same area include Kabini Sanga, who coteaches a course on indigenous research at Victoria University, Wellington, and Dr Michael Mel at the University of Goroka in Papua New Guinea (Kabini Sanga, pers comm, June 2002), as well as Tupeni Baba, now at the Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland. Various Māori studies and education programs in Aotearoa also offer courses with a focus on indigenous thought, research, and related topics.

5 “Native Pacific Islander” is how David Welchman Gegeo described himself in a recent article in *The Contemporary Pacific* (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001, 55).

6 Other reasons, too extensive to explore here, were raised by Edward Said in his 1993 book, *Culture and Imperialism*.

7 Much of the work produced by the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service in Papua New Guinea has either been written by anthropologists or used anthropological methods in efforts to better understand Melanesian cultures and to contextualize Christianity.

8 Other efforts exploring Pacific values and knowledge include the four-volume *Science of Pacific Island People*, published by the Institute of Pacific Studies (Morrison, Geraghty, and Crowl 1994). This publication brings together papers presented at the first international conference on the Science of Pacific Island People, organized at the University of the South Pacific in July 1992.

9 One Samoan observer suggested that the voices have been mute because at present they are scattered and incoherent (Morgan Tuimaleali‘ifano, pers comm, May 2000).

10 For instance, as Ennio Mantovani has explained, in Papua New Guinea land is part of the community; it is not treated as a commodity. Therefore, “[the selling of land] is not primarily a question of money, it is an ethical question. The same way as one cannot ‘sell’ one’s mother, one cannot sell one’s land” (Mantovani 1991, 68). Developers and donors grudgingly accept this particular ethic, which one finds across the Pacific, only because not to do so would have serious security consequences.

11 As regional academics we are frequently confronted with this discourse, adopted by many of our colleagues, administrators, policymakers, and others.

The voices of those living their values on a daily basis do not generally permeate the walls of academia.

12 Other voices, notably from Africa, are also questioning the domination of western thought. See, for instance, Mutua 2002; *Le Monde diplomatique* 2003.

13 We are borrowing the expression “universal dialogue” from Pothin Wete, lecturer at Pacific Theological College.

14 A South Pacific Consultation on Theological Education, held in Sāmoa in 1978 in preparation for the Fourth Pacific Conference of Churches Assembly, recommended that “local, subregional, and regional seminars on Pacific theology” be organized. The Fourth Pacific Conference of Churches, held in 1981 in Tonga, concluded, “Theology in the Pacific in the past has been dominated and controlled by Western theological priorities. This has hindered the development of authentic Pacific theologies and created a ‘theological dependence’ on Western theology” (quoted in Kadiba 1987, 140). Dr Sione Havea, one of the strong proponents of the development of Pacific theology, was principal of Pacific Theological Collège in the early 1980s.

15 Some still argue that not enough Pacific Islander voices are heard—and many non-Pacific Islanders have also contributed and continue to contribute to the debate.

16 As Ron Crocombe has pointed out, while currently the “foreign” or universal values in the Pacific are generally “western” values, the growing influence of the Asian countries in the region may result in new “outside” (ie, Asian) philosophical, religious, and political values impacting the region (pers comm, June 2002).

17 For a detailed explanation of all the meanings of these terms, see Logovae 1982.

18 Logovae wrote, “The orator acquires, possesses and develops . . . *moe* for the specific purpose of insuring the welfare and security of his family” (1982, 10).

19 In Samoan, *fa’a-* is a prefix with several meanings; among the most common are “cause to have or do [something],” “characteristic of,” or “in the manner of.” The suffix *-ga* is often a nominalizer.

20 The intent here is not to promote theologians or the role of the Church, but to demonstrate that the work of a number of Pacific theologians researching Pacific values has a potentially wide application.

21 This 2002 IPS publication is an edited version of Tuwere’s PhD thesis, entitled “Making Sense of *Vanua* (Land) in the Fijian Context: A Theological Interpretation” (Melbourne College of Divinity, 1992).

22 Entering “universal dialogue” does imply using the tools of literacy and modern scholarship to get at or beyond the Washington (and now post-Washington) consensus that determines much policymaking throughout the world. Getting ideas circulated requires publicizing them in forms that are accessible not only to the local communities engaging in them, but to a wider, influential audience.

23 Kabini Sanga has described these worlds as "In-School" and "Out-of-School," explaining: "Throughout PICs [Pacific Island Countries], the world of IS and that of OS are seen as distinct entities. . . . The IS world is one of conflicting value systems, of cultural intrusion, of identity denial, of pretensions and of compelling aspirations for things not theirs. . . . [The world of OS] is the world of non-compartmentalisation, of being always tentative, of frequent doses of grace, of learning and working together, of competing in fun and of purposive socialisation" (Sanga 2002, 53).

24 According to Teaero, the "search for relevance in educational programmes in the Pacific started in earnest in the 1970s with an emphasis on self-reliance" (1999, 74).

25 Konai Helu Thaman is UNESCO Chair in Teacher Education and Culture at the University of the South Pacific. The reader used in the course draws on the work of Pacific students who follow "a conceptual model" that Thaman used to "study Tongan educational ideas while conducting fieldwork in the 1980s," to write about educational concepts in their country. See Thaman 2002.

26 The series, titled "Pacific Cultures in the Teacher Education Curriculum," is published by the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific. As the editors explained, this initiative resulted from a research project, financed by UNESCO (Office of the Pacific States, based in Apia) to assess "the extent to which teacher education curricula in the region incorporated elements of Pacific cultures in the content as well as methodology of courses offered in the various teacher education institutions" (Thaman 2000, 1). The need for improvements in this area led to the production of these modules. See Thaman 2000.

27 We would like to thank Motarilavo Hilda Lini for providing us with documentation about TuVanuatu Kominiti.

28 According to Hilda Lini, "The language is made up of 38 symbols that represent sounds" and is "taken from sand drawings" (PNB 1998, 14). Lini also reported that when he conducted research on this language, the chief responsible for establishing the Institute found that it was made up of two parts: the men's, who do the "talking" drawings, and the women's, who do the "counting" (or economic) drawings. Further, Lini found that other parts of Vanuatu and the rest of the Pacific have similar "symbols," which may indicate the existence of a Melanesian or Pacific writing (see PNB 1998, 14).

29 Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo noted that the Kwara'ae project began in part as a reaction against the kind of research that had taken place before in their community: "the project group wanted to create an indigenous account of indigenous cultures. For decades linguistic, anthropological, and development researchers had come to West Kwara'ae to collect data. Villagers not only felt much of this work to be exploitative, but they were unimpressed by what they regarded as very superficial questions that the researchers asked, and the non-Kwara'ae way in which they did their work" (2001, 67).

30 One of these was to have Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo document their project in order to have their work published in English "to make it available to other Solomon and Pacific Islanders," and to have their "own voices and cultural knowledge written in their own words to be out in the public domain, just as the work of outside researchers on them and other Pacific groups is available to the public" (2001, 68).

31 Although Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo remind us that the "use of the body to know the world is an epistemological universal" (2001, 62), western emphasis on detachment and "objectivity" have done much in western conceptualization to remove the subject from her or his senses and the environment.

32 For a longer development on Kwara'ae philosophical notions of a good life, see Gegeo 1998.

33 Spate's 1959 description of *vakaviti* so embarrassed the Fijian establishment that they renamed it *vakavanua* (way of the land).

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Abstract

Among the reams of volumes published on the Pacific, mostly by foreigners (but increasingly by Pacific Islanders), only a few have examined Pacific thought and how it relates to contemporary ideas, paradigms, and ways of doing. Existing material in this area has been written mainly by Pacific theologians, educators, and more recently by native and indigenous anthropologists and sociologists. While theological works have remained essentially hidden in library stacks in unpublished theses, articles written by native and indigenous anthropologists and sociologists have been published in recent editions of *The Contemporary Pacific*. The voice of educators, led particularly by the USP School of Education but present also in other parts of the Pacific, is still somewhat marginal in terms of its impact on mainstream education. Put together, the work of these Pacific scholars represents an important building block for the elaboration of a body of Pacific thought, which, like an open *fale*, should not shut out the world but invite it in on its own terms. In turn, this body of Pacific thought should contribute to the affirmation of a Pacific philosophy and ethic: a body of applicable concepts and values to guide interaction within the region and beyond.

KEYWORDS: Pacific, thought, governance, ethics, theology, community, education

*Whose Knowledge? Epistemological
Collisions in Solomon Islands
Community Development*

David Welchman Gegeo and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo

Unless the South learns to harness the forces of modern science and technology, it has no chance of fulfilling its developmental aspirations or its yearning for an effective voice in the management of global interdependence. All its societies must therefore mount a determined effort to absorb, adapt, and assimilate new technological advances as part of their development strategies.

JULIUS NYERERE AND OTHERS,
The Challenge to the South

Traditional knowledge has frequently been over-looked in the search by outside professionals to find solutions to the development problems of the poor. . . . However, increased use of traditional knowledge may make development programs more appropriate to local conditions, provide innovative solutions to certain problems, contribute to a sense of self-worth and collective self-esteem among local people, and enhance popular participation and empowerment. [Therefore] development programs should start with the premise that poor people . . . are knowledgeable and skillful managers of their own environment.

JOHN BROHMAN,
Popular Development

The era of decolonization in Pacific Island nations began in the 1960s as it did elsewhere in the Third World.¹ More recently, the island Pacific seems to have entered a period of internal decolonization in the form of ethnic conflicts similar to those going on in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Central Europe. For example, Fiji experienced its first ethnically based

political coup in 1987 (Lal 1988, 1992; Lal and Nelson 1995), and its third in 2000 (Lal 2002). Beginning in 1998, a conflict in Solomon Islands between indigenous peoples of Guadalcanal and immigrants from Malaita island has brought the country's economy to a virtual standstill, culminating in a paramilitary coup on 5 June 2000 and the establishment of an uneasy peace several months later. The roots of the ethnic conflict in the Solomons lie deep in its colonial history, but unequal distribution of resources has been an important factor. The major players on the Guadalcanal side of the ethnic conflict offered the same reasons for their actions that have been heard in other ethnic conflicts in the Pacific islands: people not receiving full benefits from development of their resources, their land being settled illegally by migrant groups who lack respect for local cultures, lopsided political representation in government, and so on (Kabutaulaka 1999; Kabutaulaka and others 1999; Mamaloni and others 1999; Solomon Islands Government 1999).

While these complaints are valid, the underlying causes have persisted in the Solomons because the structure and conceptualization of "development" has never really moved beyond classic modernization theory, emphasizing large-scale, top-down, center-periphery economic enterprises such as plantations, mining, logging, and export fisheries. If anything, the contemporary emphasis on globalization, global capitalism, economic restructuring, and free trade has intensified pressure on fragile economies like that of Solomon Islands to focus on large-scale, centralized, export industries. "Development" in the Solomons continues to depend on overseas aid and focus almost exclusively on economics and urban areas. It continues to ignore political, educational, and humanistic aspects, rural needs, and the importance of traditional cultures and their significance to national development (Roughan 1986, 1997; Gegeo 1994). Even nongovernmental organizations with messages of concern for cultural aspects of development have typically perpetuated the modernization paradigm and often undermined rather than supported indigenous countervoices (see Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 1999).

Eighty-five percent of Solomon Islanders live in rural areas, supporting themselves primarily by subsistence agriculture (Roughan 1991). Yet the national government, like the colonial government before it, has paid only scanty, sporadic attention to rural development. Because the national government is committed to a "ripple" effect in development (the idea that development at the center will ripple out to the periphery), it concentrates its efforts at the national level (Solomon Islands Government 1985). The

government position has been that if national development succeeds, then everybody succeeds. Government officials distrust local villagers' ability to make "good use" of government investments in development, such as seed grants (Solomon Islands Government 1989). They tend to attribute small project failures to villager ignorance, lack of managerial skills, fatalistic attitudes, kin connections, and so on—echoing the arguments of classic modernization theorists (Lerner 1964; Apter 1987). But in reality, much of the failure of rural development in the Solomons is due to the persistent modernization paradigm under which development efforts are still governed (Gegeo 1994, 1998). In this respect, Solomon Islands is still at least thirty years behind development theory and the more progressive practices in some other nations.

Despite the movement toward a more people-centered, bottom-up philosophy in development education and practice, in this article we show how modernization, globalization, and older Anglo-European notions of community development continue to fail rural development in the Solomons, by analyzing a specific rural development project aimed at assisting youth in Kwara'ae, Malaita (map 1). The project functioned successfully for a decade until it was taken over by a retired government official. Because of his education, training, and experience working with outside development agencies, this retired government official imposed the government's modernization framework on the project, including the valuing of Anglo-European knowledge over indigenous knowledge, and the centralization of leadership and knowledge in one person. Both are contrary to indigenous ways of operating in which the knowledge behind a project is decentralized, along with leadership: that is, no single person is looked to as the expert on all aspects of the project because everyone contributes his or her expertise; and knowledge is regarded not as a static body of information, but as always undergoing (re)construction to make it relevant to changing conditions.

THE ARGUMENT FOR INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Among the differing perspectives argued in "alternative" and "sustainable development" (Friedmann 1992; Taylor and Mackenzie 1992; Burkey 1993; Singh and Titi 1995; Brohman 1996; Pieterse 1998), the past decade has seen a growing emphasis on the significance of local or indigenous knowledge in social change and development (Connerton 1989; Cernea 1991;

Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992; Hobart 1993; Gegeo 1994, 1998; Scoones and Thompson 1994; Warren, Slikkerveer, and Brokensha 1995; Pieterse and Parekh 1995; Chapman 1995; Brush and Stabinsky 1996; Nader 1996; Goebel 1998; Hirtz 1998; Keck 1998). However, even the literature on local or indigenous knowledge focuses on people's existing knowledge, that is, knowledge already in everyday use and practice. The assumption behind this focus is that knowledge can be extracted from the knowers, treated as a text, and employed in a mechanical, instrumental manner—a conceptualization of knowledge consistent with the "container" metaphor in which knowledge is treated as content and human minds as individualized containers, a view made obsolete by current learning theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Resnick, Levine, and Teasley 1991). The extractive, textual nature of knowledge is an Anglo-European, top-down assumption congruent with modernization, even when applied by those critical of modernization. To the contrary, when villagers apply indigenous knowledge in development, they are involved in a process of constantly (re)theorizing, (re)creating, and (re)structuring knowledge. The Kwara'ae make a metaphorical distinction between introduced knowledge and indigenous knowledge: introduced knowledge is knowledge "from the shore reaching out to the ocean" (knowledge that comes to the shore from the sea); and indigenous knowledge is knowledge "from the shore to the mountains." Once introduced knowledge becomes indigenized—(re)constructed and transformed to fit indigenous and local practices, experience, and culture—it is regarded by the Kwara'ae as indigenous although not "traditional" in the sense of coming down through history from ancient times. In the case of indigenized knowledge, people understand that they have taken something and made it their own, and that they now claim ownership of the knowing involved with this something; that is, it has become part of their knowledge system.

For rural villagers in cultures like Kwara'ae, their knowledge is encoded in the features of the environment, and development in the Anglo-European sense is unfamiliar to them. What has been missing from the development literature is systematic, careful examination of how differing indigenous peoples construct knowledge—that is, indigenous epistemology.

By *indigenous epistemology* we mean a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating, (re)formulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture (Gegeo 1994, 1998; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo

2001; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 2002). Conceptually, indigenous epistemology is concerned with the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behavior. All epistemological systems are socially constructed and (in)formed through sociopolitical, economic, and historical context and processes.² In writing about indigenous epistemology, we find our work parallel to the notion of *standpoint epistemology* as developed by feminists, which recognizes that “[k]nowledge claims are always socially situated” (Harding 1993, 54) rather than universalistic. By this is meant that knowledge is created in a particular situation by a particular group of people. It may or may not be universalistic in nature, but it is always created situationally.

Elsewhere (eg, Gegeo 1994; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001) we have written at length about Kwara’ae indigenous epistemological strategies used in such discourse events as village meetings, dispute resolution, and classroom teaching. Here we look in a more general way at how epistemological strategies are employed in a development project. Our interest in the collision of knowledge systems leading to various kinds of development failures comes from the first author’s indigenous knowledge of Kwara’ae culture, and his observations growing up during a period of rapid, but failed, modernization-style development in West Kwara’ae during the 1950s and 1960s. Our interest also comes from more than twenty years’ research (from the late 1970s through the 1990s) on development and related aspects of social change in Kwara’ae, in which the issue of colliding knowledge systems repeatedly came to the surface.

Data for the case examined here include in-depth interviews with project participants and more casual conversations with other involved villagers conducted throughout the life of the project and especially in concentrated interviews in 1992, 1994, and 1998. Reported speech comes from interviews in which there was consensus among interviewees on key wording. Kwara’ae children are trained from the age of three to report the speech of others as accurately and fully as possible, because this kind of recall is essential to testifying in village meetings and especially court cases where reported speech is treated as important evidence and is subject to intense interrogation.

In analyzing the case presented here, our objective is not to lay out the details of knowledge construction, intersection, and mismatch, which

would require a book-length treatment (but see an example analysis in Gegeo 1994). Rather, we want to provide a general overview of the collision of knowledge systems and the social fallout from that collision.

DEVELOPMENT ON MALAITA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Malaita is the least developed of the six major islands in the Solomons. The history behind Malaita's lack of development can be traced to colonial times when the British colonists judged Malaita—the most populated island in the Solomons even in the nineteenth century—as unsuitable for major agricultural development. This assumption derived from attempts to establish European-style farms with crops inappropriate for Malaita's shallow soils and heavy rainfall (Malaita is essentially rain forest). However, other potential development was never tried on Malaita because the colonial administration regarded Malaita's greatest asset as its abundance of hardworking male laborers who could be exported first to plantations in Queensland (Australia), Fiji, Samoa, and New Caledonia, and later to Guadalcanal and the western district of the Solomons for plantations established by colonists there. Historically, these laborers have worked for very low wages or have been paid in consumable items such as food and tobacco (Moore 1985; Bennett 1987), and so could not remit large sums back to Malaita with which to begin their own medium-sized projects. Colonial development was highly centralized and promoted the benefit of the colonial administration.³

Even after the Solomons became independent, the practices of the colonial administration toward Malaita continued. As a result, Malaita has provided most of the labor for national development in the Solomons,⁴ while Malaita itself has remained relatively undeveloped. The colonial and national governments have used Malaita for demonstration projects and training centers, but again, these activities do not bring much income or employment to Malaita and are insufficient as a base on which Malaita itself can develop. Training centers, for instance, have been government- or church-subsidized and cannot even be taxed by Malaita Province. Similarly, Malaitans who are educated and in the professions (medicine, etc) have migrated off-island to other parts of the Solomons where urban centers and employment opportunities are greater due to centralized national development.

The need to create development opportunities for rural youth in the

Solomons is critical. Children under fifteen years of age constitute 47 percent of the Solomons' population; nearly one person in five is under five years old (UNICEF 1993). Since the 1980s, schooling has been promoted as the way to help youth find jobs in the cash economy. Yet most children in rural areas fail or leave school by the end of their primary education, and even those who complete secondary find a very tight job market. In fact, the unemployment rates for senior primary school and secondary school graduates are equally high today, because of the scarcity of jobs. Educational disparities are great from one province to another, and between urban and rural areas. In some areas of Malaita, for instance, as many as 40 percent of children are not in school (UNICEF 1993, 41). About 63 percent of Malaita's total population has received no formal education, compared to 9 percent in Western Province, the latter being one of the focal areas of centralized development (Solomon Islands Ministry of Finance 1990, 275). Nearly 40 percent of Malaita's teachers are untrained (Solomon Islands Statistics Office 1992). Malaita's students have the poorest record for gaining admission to secondary school—their percentage is about half that of the main urban center of Honiara (UNICEF 1993, 46). The flow of Malaita's children into secondary school is inhibited by admissions policies that set limits for various ethnic groups and do not accommodate Malaitans' larger proportion of the total population.

When Malaita youths, especially males,⁵ fail to get into secondary school, the opportunities for them on Malaita are very few. They also suffer intense embarrassment from not having succeeded in school after their parents and kin invested scarce resources in their school fees (public education is tuition driven in the Solomons). As a result, for decades a large number of Malaita youth, mostly male, have drifted into urban areas in search of employment or because they are attracted by the "glitter" of urban life—exposure to cinema, international musics, and so on. Typically these youth with little education can find employment only in very temporary, casual labor situations; most find nothing. Many become involved in petty crime, alcoholism, drugs, and gangs. In town they are beyond the control and guidance of the extended family, and separated from their indigenous cultural roots.

Back home on Malaita in the villages, a number of projects have been designed locally to try to keep male youth on Malaita, give meaning to their lives, develop their skills for earning a living, and increase their sense of self-worth and cultural rootedness. We turn now to the specific case of a project so designed, the 'Oka Village Youth Project.⁶

'OKA VILLAGE YOUTH PROJECT:
INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PRAXIS

In the early 1980s, a cross-generational group of men in 'Oka village, concerned about the rising numbers of village youth migrating to other islands and urban centers (such as Honiara, the national capital on Guadalcanal) in search of jobs, formed a youth project to help keep youth home and give them a stake in the community. The project involved young men in sports, cultural activities, and income-generating work, parallel to the integration of sports, culture, and work in the traditional men's house of the past. They began with a club in which older members taught younger members how to play soccer and coached them in games, while a group of elders in their forties to seventies taught the young men about traditional Kwara'ae culture and dances. The club organized soccer tournaments in which teams in the area paid a fee to compete. During the matches, members of the club sold beverages and food to spectators to raise money. Similarly, club members learned and performed *kastom* (Solomon Islands Pijin: 'culture, tradition') dances for paying spectators. The elders realized that youths would be more interested in learning about tradition if it were tied to the exciting performances that traditional Kwara'ae dances involve, and if they could generate income from dancing. Together the soccer and culture dimensions of the project were simply called *iut* 'youth, youth group'.

The soccer/dance club was very successful, with its membership mushrooming almost overnight to involve more than a hundred young men (one of the largest villages on Malaita, 'Oka village has a population of several hundred people). The club decided to initiate a series of small additional projects to raise money. With each member contributing a membership fee of a few dollars, they collected sufficient funds to purchase a fifty-kilo bag of white flour and an empty forty-gallon gasoline drum with which to make an oven. From this beginning they established a bakery and produced loaves of bread that they sold to the village. They earned enough from the bag of flour to purchase five more. Moreover, they used some of the first profits to buy seed to begin a Chinese cabbage garden. Then they went on to plant corn, pineapple, sweet potato, and peanuts.

Once these small projects were successfully underway, an elder suggested starting another activity:

I told the youth group that, even though the projects we currently were running were making money, we should not rely too much on them, knowing the

way money circulates in rural areas. Some years there is good circulation of money . . . [and] other years the circulation is bad.

The group decided to use some of their profits to begin a copra project. As they did not have among them an established plantation of coconut palm trees nearby, they hired a truck to travel north some twenty-thirty kilometers to villages that produced copra but had no easy transport to the market in Auki. On the first trip they purchased thirty bags of dried copra, which they sold at considerable profit in Auki. This allowed them to fund another copra trip, and to open a youth club bank account in Auki. Some money they set aside to allow their club to participate in local soccer matches, some was devoted to savings, and some designated to cover the costs of the other income-generating projects. Moreover, they kept money in the village for youth club member emergencies. For instance, members already married might need cash in the middle of the night to hire a truck to take a child to the hospital. The club also performed a community service by loaning small amounts of money to villagers who experienced emergencies of their own, such as council taxes, trucks to the hospital, or school fees.

The club continued its small projects very successfully over several years, to the point of starting a rice project in the late 1980s. As rice was a crop new to local villagers, the elders wrote a letter to the Japanese ambassador in Honiara asking for assistance. In the letter, the elders emphasized that they were poor rural villagers who wanted to do something for youth, and that the Solomon Islands government had not responded to several requests for help from the club. Two Japanese representatives then visited 'Oka village, and the youth club performed traditional dancing to welcome them. The representatives took the elders' letter to Japan, and subsequently a Japanese volunteer abroad was sent to assist the club in its rice project. A year later, a second Japanese volunteer was sent to work with the club for two years.

The success of 'Oka Village Youth Project in these early years was closely associated with its social organization and foundation in cultural knowledge. With regard to social organization, the project leadership was decentralized and egalitarian. First, leadership was not invested in a single individual nor even in a specific group; rather, it was shared among elders, middle-aged men, and youth according to the expertise and knowledge required for a given activity. Thus, a particular elder who was especially known for his traditional cultural knowledge of *mao* (a sacred Kwara'ae

men's dance) led the teaching of Kwara'ae dancing. Several men with specialized knowledge in traditional agriculture supervised the gardens. Another man who had once run a local bakery in the village (using skills he had learned from the Chinese while working on a plantation off-island) taught everyone how to bake bread. Other men and youth who had been expert soccer players taught and coached the games. All decisions were made in group meetings regularly held by the entire cross-generational youth project membership.

Knowledge experts did teach, but authority was not centralized and decisions were not dictated from the top. Rather, relationships were horizontal and the education process was hands-on. The project was action-oriented and offered the opportunity for youths to interact equally with elders and middle-aged men in a mutually respectful relationship. The teaching/learning strategy could be characterized as legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice: with learners beginning as recognized participants on the periphery of an activity and gradually moving to full participation in the center as their skills develop, and "learning as an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave and Wenger 1991, 35).

This mutually respectful relationship was also maintained by other group strategies. One of these was humor. Project members engaged in a great deal of joking and friendly teasing, which helped to downplay status and eased moments of tension when errors were made (for example, when someone performed a task incorrectly and attention was called to it). This is not to say that heated arguments did not occur from time to time within the project. However, as members knew from individual experience in previous projects, arguments and tensions needed to be dealt with openly and immediately. Moreover, as the elders later commented, often these conflicts were constructive because they reflected youths' struggling with their own identity growing up in a rapidly changing society. The point made by the elders parallels Childs' (2002) concept of "constructive disputing" in which diverse or competing positions are recognized and dealt with rather than ignored and suppressed. Because the youth project members were all from the same village, they saw each other constantly in daily life, and employed many of the strategies of amelioration and indirection that keep relationships among villagers as comfortable as possible. Members of the project were very self-conscious of these issues and discussed them publicly in project meetings.

Older members of the project used traditional *fa'amanata'anga* 'coun-

seling' events and strategies to resolve intra-project disputes. *Fa'amanata'anga* literally means 'shaping the mind' (*fa'a* is a causative prefix; *manata* the verb and noun 'think, mind'; and *'anga* a nominative suffix), and is a general term for the teaching of knowledge and abstract skills. In its more specialized sense it refers to counseling in which intellectual instruction, interpersonal counseling, and conflict resolution occur simultaneously, serially, or independently (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990). Children are initiated into *fa'amanata'anga* events and the appropriate behavior during them by eighteen months of age in many families.

Club members carefully screened applicants and recruits who wanted to join, so that trust and respect were highlighted. The youths did not feel threatened by the adults in the project because they were all part of the same local community, and none had a hidden agenda beyond normal village politics (which everyone understood). They were all of the same socio-economic status—as one adult put it, "We all live in thatched houses!" In fact, living in a thatched house was seen as a measure of people's commitment to doing something for themselves and the group, to improve the lives of all of them. None of them had relatives highly placed in the government or the church, in private business, or studying overseas, so they had to depend on their own labor. Most of the elders were illiterate, but even the youths had finished only a few years of primary schooling.

Given their levels of education, the only body of knowledge they felt comfortable using, until the initiation of the rice project, was indigenous knowledge; and the only epistemology they knew for developing new knowledge out of their experiences was indigenous epistemology. Moreover, the epistemology they employed for the *application* of knowledge was itself indigenous. The distinction we are making here is between epistemology as a theory of knowledge, and epistemology as a theory of the application of knowledge. This distinction is important because of the later causes of the demise of the project.

The strategy of beginning one small agricultural project after another following on the initial success of the first is based on indigenous forms of agriculture, whereby diverse crops are raised together simultaneously. In Kwara'ae, the term for this is *fasidoladola'anga* 'the planting of different crops together; mixed cropping' (lit., *fasi* 'plant'; *doladola* 'mix'; *'anga* nominative suffix). More than that, this strategy is anchored in the indigenous concept of diet. *Adami'anga* 'the eating of a variety of foods in the same meal' is the Kwara'ae concept of a holistic, balanced diet (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1985).

It was no accident that after the club used its initial profits from soccer and *mao* performances to start a bakery, members went on to begin agricultural activities, including planting gardens, transporting and selling copra, and then initiating a rice project. First, they were diversifying to make effective use of the variety of expertise within the group. Members felt strongly that the only way the club would prosper was to take everyone's expertise into consideration so that everyone had a role, as in a family. In fact, the members referred to the youth project metaphorically as a "family."

Second, they diversified to ensure that the growth of a given activity remained within their ability to manage, and alternatively, that failure of one or two activities would not bring down the whole project. These two considerations are based on people's knowledge and practices in subsistence gardening. The first consideration is referred to in Kwara'ae as *kwaisaefafi'i* 'see something at eye level' (lit., *kwai* is a reciprocal prefix; *sae-fafi'i* 'manageable'), as opposed to *lia 'ala'a* 'look up [beyond one's reach]'. Epistemologically, *kwaisaefafi'i'anga* (the noun form of the word) refers to the relationship between the knower and the known, that is, object of knowledge (see the discussion of "epistemic horizon" below). The second consideration is illustrated in people's practice of planting several gardens, each in a different location (valley, ridge, mountains) as a hedge against crop failure from drought, storm, or pests.

The third and equally important reason for diversification was the comfort level project members felt with agriculture. In Kwara'ae indigenous epistemology, a distinction is made between *diflopmen* 'development' and *bisnis* 'business'. *Diflopmen* is seen as a mode of operation promoting life in line with the Kwara'ae philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga*, which embraces the notion of 'the state of being at the head or pinnacle of life'. More specifically, it refers to the ideal state of *ali'afu'anga* 'total completeness', where *mauri'a* 'life', and *mauri'anga* 'the process of living', involve happiness, security, plenitude, and the key cultural values of love, peace, and sharing (Gegeo 1998). *Diflopmen* is seen as "alive" in contrast to *bisnis*, which is seen as "dead." The most important distinguishing characteristic of *diflopmen* in this respect is that a project so labeled *saka ma'i māna* or *fa'asia limana ngwae* 'emerges out of one's own hands'. Moreover, most projects labeled *diflopmen* actually involve "products" that are living.

Bisnis, in contrast, is seen as a "dead" or "inactive" mode of production concerned only with material possessions. It is also seen as external to oneself and not emerging from one's hands. In the case of, say, store

goods, the goods themselves (eg, tinned fish) are actually dead, and therefore their only value is monetary. More importantly, *bisnis* is “dead” because it involves introduced activities—such as a bakery—that come with their own body of knowledge and epistemology. For rural people, that body of knowledge is still in the realm of “information” rather than “knowledge.” When a Kwara‘ae villager talks about a bakery, that person’s knowledge is soon exhausted, and what it takes to start a bakery is out of the immediate control of the would-be owner because it entails purchased items such as the ingredients and aluminum sheets for kneading and baking. In contrast, *diflopmen* is “alive” because carrying out its activities requires indigenous knowledge rather than outside information; people have been subsisting by agriculture in the Solomons for thousands of years. When Kwara‘ae villagers talk about gardening, it is almost impossible to exhaust their knowledge and ability to theorize. They feel less comfortable engaging in economic activities they consider *bisnis* rather than those they see as *diflopmen*. It is not surprising, therefore, that although the youth project started with a bakery, which is seen as *bisnis* and therefore “dead,” it soon moved on to agriculture (gardening, copra, rice).

‘OKA YOUTH PROJECT ENCOUNTERING VILLAGE POLITICS

Even before youth project members appealed to Japan for help, they began to encounter attempts by others within ‘Oka village to take over their project. A large group of village chiefs, elders, and other men made their argument on both indigenous and introduced grounds. From an indigenous perspective, they used expressions such as, “It is fitting that we all cooperate and do things together as people of one village.” They conceived of the project as *kamiuniti* ‘community, community development’ and argued that, now that the project was redefined as community development, the next step was to ensure that its money was safe, which meant they should start a community credit union, followed by a general store.

During a village-wide meeting, youth project members questioned community development supporters about their motivation for “collapsing” (as youth project members saw it) the youth group into a village-wide project. They pointed out that such large-scale local projects had been tried several times before in their area, and all had failed. Nevertheless, the village chiefs invited one of the leaders of a previously failed project to come to the village and set up a credit union. When youth group members con-

tinued to resist having their project absorbed into the community development effort, other villagers began to ridicule them as an "aging youth group" (because the membership included elders and middle-aged men as well as youth).

The youth responded to these chiding remarks by arguing that elders were members because they were part of the original cross-generational vision of the youth group, possessed traditional knowledge, could handle the hard labor tasks that the youngest members could not, and brought skills beyond soccer—skills needed to make the project grow. Additionally, as youths, several of the elders had been involved in failed large-scale projects directed by outsiders using a modernization paradigm. They had insight into the causes of these project failures. Most particularly, they rejected outsider explanations attributing project failure to traditional cultural practices. Rather, according to their analysis, earlier project failure was the result of applying Anglo-European knowledge and strategies with which rural people were unfamiliar and that were inappropriate to local culture and environmental conditions. Moreover, the youth argued that the aims of the youth project were educational, not just money-making like the community development effort. In that respect, the community development effort was unquestionably modernization rather than development.

Concerns about the pressure being put on them led elders in the youth project to visit the provincial government headquarters in Auki, to seek information about running village projects. However, they rejected what they learned there. As one later said:

We decided to stick with our original idea of running the youth group according to the egalitarian and consensual way things were organized and done in *kastom* [because] after we had studied [the provincial guidelines], we decided it was irrelevant to our purpose.

This was the point at which the youth group, wanting to start a rice project, appealed for assistance to the Japanese government, having had their requests to the Solomons government turned down. They felt the need to incorporate outside information about rice-growing into their indigenous knowledge of agriculture because, although rice is a highly popular food item on Malaita, they had not grown it before. The land they wanted to use was swampy and unsuitable for local varieties of taro and sweet potato, but suitable for rice. They saw the help that the Japanese could provide as information and skills, not "knowledge." "Knowledge" was

what they would develop themselves from experience growing the rice. This view is an indigenous perspective on knowledge, in which knowledge involves expanding on and (re)constructing information and skills.

During the middle years of the 'Oka Village Youth Project, in the discourse of the argument between project members and the other villagers who were attempting to absorb the project, the terms *iut* and *kamiuniti* were used for youth group and community development, respectively. Semantically, these two terms entailed meanings that contrasted indigenous with introduced values and ways of operating.

Specifically, *iut* connoted a focus on youth, but also doing things that were under one's control using primarily indigenous knowledge and indigenous epistemology. That is, the activities were within villagers' *epistemic horizon*. Although we use an English label here, the concept comes from Kwara'ae. *Liatau'anga* refers to 'seeing far', that is, always seeing the horizon at a distance and never reaching it (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001). The Kwara'ae notion of epistemic horizon is that one is motivated to do something when one is able to see far ahead. And in doing, one experiences a growth of knowledge. Seeing distances is itself epistemological because it involves theorizing. Epistemic horizon implies that there is no barrier or cloud between the seer and the horizon, and that everything in between can therefore be seen clearly and is within one's knowledge grasp. Questions arising were less "How do I do this?" than "How much of this should I do?" All is within one's reach as one continues to build on the already known.

In contrast, *kamiuniti* connoted nonindigenous ways of organizing activities, the distancing of relationships, large-scale projects, a concern exclusively with material gain, and introduced knowledge and epistemology. Epistemologically, it thus connotes activities and knowledge outside villagers' epistemic horizon. In fact, "community development" as understood and used in 'Oka village during this time conveyed the notion of *tuamalafaka'anga* 'pseudo-westernization'; literally, 'living in imitation of life brought by the ships' (Gegeo 1994, 1998). Members of the youth group, especially those who were adults in the 1940s–1960s, had individually and collectively experienced a great deal of that kind of community development. Like all large villages in Kwara'ae, 'Oka village itself had been founded on the framework of *tuamalafaka'anga*: it consists of several clans that moved to the coast from the interior as they were converted to Christianity and as they sought access to outside trade.

The youth group saw itself as founded on an alternative conceptualization and praxis, as members believed that it was precisely the desire and attractions of *tuamalafaka'anga* that were luring youth away from villages into urban areas, with the attendant involvement in greater poverty, crime, and other problems. Members deliberately avoided using terms like *bisnis* or *diflopmen* in their project to emphasize that their vision was different—that it was anchored in traditional culture, drawing on the positive aspects that could prepare youth for today's changing world. Indeed, the Kwara'ae have an indigenous concept equivalent to "development" in the holistic sense, as encoded in at least thirty-two terms which discuss its characteristics (Gegeo 1994, 299–300), for example: *talau'anga* 'being on one's own', literally, 'following the path cut by oneself and doing things one sees fit to meet one's purposes and needs'; *bulaofaolo'anga* 'growing anew'; *lafuta'ilana tua'a* 'the lifting or rising up of the family' from the inside; *fuliru'anga* 'establishing things (not just talking about it), bringing to fruition'. This set of concepts formed the core of the vision for the youth group. More importantly, they were terms in the youth's indigenous language and within their epistemic horizon, such that they understood the terms and their meanings and knew how to apply them, in contrast to introduced English terms like *independence*, *self-sufficiency*, and *self-reliance*, which formed the core of community development terminology introduced into Kwara'ae by previous failed projects. The Kwara'ae youth group's reactions to and frustrations with such English concepts paralleled those reported by Hanlon (1998, 143) for Micronesians in the 1970s, who experienced "larger epistemological doubts" in trying to translate modernization terminology into local languages.

It is particularly telling that the first new activities supporters of the community development vision wanted to introduce—a credit union and a general store—were activities that had repeatedly failed in modernization efforts in West Kwara'ae. As an elder put it during a tendentious village meeting over the youth project's future, "Have you people still not seen? We are merely repeating things that we have tried and that have failed." General stores and credit unions also fit into the Kwara'ae indigenous conception of "dead" rather than "alive" types of projects.⁷ As pointed out above, items in a store are seen as "dead" because they were produced by someone else and are literally dead. A credit union is "dead" because money itself is literally dead. A metaphor used locally is that one cannot toss a dollar bill onto the floor of the forest and expect it to sprout

like a potato vine. Moreover, the growth of money in a credit union depends on other money villagers put in. Given the level of poverty in the villages, growth is extremely slow. Further, unlike plants in a garden which can be seen to grow week by week, monetary growth is invisible to the eye, and so is not motivating to villagers. Credit unions are also seen as “selfish” and “discriminatory” because they depend on individual wealth; those who already have money benefit most.

‘OKA YOUTH PROJECT, JACK TAGI, AND THE COLLISION OF EPISTEMOLOGIES

Three years after the ‘Oka Youth Project faced its first challenges from community development supporters, Jack Tagi retired to ‘Oka village from his years as a government official directing a major financial institution in Honiara. He was already known to side with the community development contingent in the village. Tagi called a village meeting during which, on a blackboard borrowed from the local school, he drew what he called a new structure for a community development project, pointing out how it would operate to everyone’s benefit. He claimed to be able to write large, professional grant proposals to outside sources that would pull in much greater sums of money than the youth group could ever expect to attract.

This was the first of several village meetings in which Tagi and his supporters attempted first to persuade, and then to force the youth club to merge with the proposed community development project. Many of these meetings involved heated exchanges between Tagi and his supporters on one side, and members of the youth project on the other. Tagi argued, “Do you know anything about finances and management?” He emphasized his education and years of experience in government-organized development. The youth group challenged Tagi’s “new structure” as identical to that of a well-known failed project involving ‘Oka village a decade earlier. They countered that he was “blinded by [his] western education.” In one passionate speech, a youth group member said:

For many years you held very important positions in businesses in Honiara [but] you never once came over to our village to ask if we villagers wanted any assistance with development projects. As a result we never looked to you for help. When we wanted to do anything in the village, we had to do it through our own struggles. Who gave you the right to force us to collapse [*asi* ‘fall’] the youth group into a community development project? You have just arrived in the village [after being away for years].

Not long after these initial meetings, two Japanese officials arrived in the village to assess the success of the youth project so far, with the intent of continuing to support it. Tagi drew them off to his house and convinced them that the youth group should merge with the community development effort. He then called a village meeting to announce this change to everyone. In the ensuing meeting, one of the youths in the project angrily said:

You are very stubborn, aren't you? We told you we did not and still do not agree with the merger [*adofiku* 'join'] you are proposing. We have worked very hard, starting with nothing, to create our youth group, and now you and your allies are telling us that we must merge with community development. You all have tried so many community development projects in this village, and nothing ever came of any of them. Whatever happened to the village credit union that you all were so proud of? Why didn't you, Tagi, do something about that? This is our youth project. Stay away from it. Why don't you, with your European [*ara'i kwao* 'white man'] knowledge that you are so boastful about, raise that credit union from the dead?

The same youth turned to the Japanese representatives and interrogated them: "I want to ask you two a question. Who brought you here? Was it the community development project or the youth group?" One of the Japanese responded, "The youth group. We came as a response to the request for assistance made by the youth group." The youth turned back to the other villagers:

Did you all hear that? Let me tell you, Tagi, if you and your supporters want a community development project, resurrect the credit union. You are not touching our youth group. Our eyes are open.

The Japanese representatives attempted to convince youth group members to merge with the others, but were unsuccessful. When Tagi's supporters again raised the issue of Tagi's greater education, another member of the youth group, an elder, responded:

We in the youth group do not need any highly educated person meddling in our affairs. We do our planning according to how we know; our plans are local [ie, indigenous ways of knowing and doing]. They cannot be turned into your high [Anglo-European large-scale] plans. You have no experience with local planning. Local planning is a different thing altogether. It has its own power [*ngasingasi'anga* 'power, efficacy'] . . . Do something in which you can apply your experience in high-level planning. We will stay with our project which seems to be doing just fine being run according to our local plans.

Nevertheless, Tagi formed a village committee to start the community development project, and tricked the youthful treasurer of the youth project into loaning him money to purchase a chain saw. He attempted to bribe members of the youth club to join him, by taking them to Honiara, paying for their fares and accommodation out of his own money, and showing them different businesses in Honiara that he claimed he could bring to 'Oka village with his knowledge and skills. Then in a manner that no one was subsequently able to figure out, Tagi managed to get control of the youth project's bank account. He may have misrepresented himself to the bank as a youth club leader, and given his social standing in the nation and community, he would have been believed. Once the monetary resources of the youth project were in Tagi's hands, the project's days were numbered.

Youth project members still attempted to resist, however. For example, Tagi wrote to the Provincial Development Unit (PDU) office in Auki, claiming that the rice project belonged to the community development project, and requesting a loan of SI\$75,000 (US\$18,750 at the time) to expand it. When youth club members found out, an elder intervened at the PDU office, which at his request sent an official to examine the project. The official ascertained that the rice project should receive only SI\$40,000 (US\$10,000) for expansion. In reality, however, Tagi's intent (which he himself stated publicly) was not to expand the rice project at all, but to use the SI\$75,000 to turn the local primary school into a church-affiliated technical training center. When Tagi learned that the elder had intervened and was partly responsible for the failure of his loan plan, he threatened to take the elder to court. The elder responded during a village meeting:

Go ahead and take me to court! I have nothing to lose or gain. I am just an ignorant villager who stood up for the right of the youth group. . . . If we the ignorant village people do not stand up for our rights, our own so-called educated people will push us around. They will use the court as a way to keep us silent and force us to go along with their ideas. . . . What Tagi is doing to our youth group is like a hunting dog that has caught an opossum and has brought it to its owner. Instead of sharing some of the meat, the owner beats the dog and eats all the meat [a well-known Kwara'ae metaphor].

Despite the attempts of the members of the youth club to hold onto their project, they faced constant verbal assaults in village meetings, and they were significantly outnumbered. Some of the youths' parents began to ally themselves with Tagi because of his wealth and social importance; many

were involved in an effort to get him elected to the national Parliament at this time.

Over the course of a couple of years, the members of the youth group became disillusioned. They soon found themselves spending more time and effort defending themselves than working productively in the project. A cost-benefit analysis, local style, led them to give the project up altogether, once attendance at project meetings began to drop, and the youth themselves began drifting off to Honiara—the very problem that the project had been intended to prevent.

Ironically, Tagi and his supporters also experienced failure. Their project soon collapsed, much more quickly than the youth project, which had lasted about a decade. Tagi also failed in his election attempt.

Tagi's was an Anglo-European, modernization vision of what the village project should be. He rallied behind him factions of the village who felt that the project should serve the whole village, not just youth. His intention to fund the project by outside grants introduced dependency on external aid, whereas before the youth club project had been "in our own hands," as one member put it. Even for the rice project, the Japanese government had provided support only in the form of Volunteers Abroad who trained project members. All of the rice-growing expenses were paid by project members themselves.

From an indigenous epistemological standpoint, Tagi's trips to Honiara were seen as *ngwasinasina* 'flashy'. This behavior was "letting too much light [into one's social space]," that is, attracting too much public attention, given the stage youth group members felt they were at in building their project. In other words, as with many other things Tagi did, his actions took the project several steps beyond the members' current epistemic horizon. One Kwara'ae expression used by youth club members for this behavior was *lofoliunga'imia* 'jump over several logs', rather than take one log at a time. What Tagi was attempting to do, of course, was give the project public visibility—an Anglo-European business notion. However, visibility in this sense runs counter to Kwara'ae cultural practices.

Tagi also restructured the project leadership, claiming, "Now your project is big and you need people with education. I can provide that leadership." Making a statement of this kind is also seen as "flashy" because in Kwara'ae one does not put oneself forward; instead one must be invited. Tagi tried to vest all leadership in himself, a highly centralized and nontraditional approach. His leadership was top-down, command style, and he made most decisions with little consultation with others. He also set up

an office in his western-style permanent house in the village, and later he rented an office in Auki, the urban center and provincial headquarters on Malaita. The appropriate indigenous approach, however, would be to have no office, but rather to meet in people's homes or the village meeting house. By local standards, Tagi's style was arrogant and boastful in contrast to the preferred Kwara'ae style of humility. As a result, people said that his leadership "brought darkness."

People either had no experience at all with the activities Tagi proposed for project expansion, or had previously failed at them. These were projects beyond people's epistemic horizon—beyond not only their epistemology for *developing* new knowledge, but especially for *applying* knowledge. The question was no longer, "How much of this should I do?" Rather, Tagi might say to someone, "Do the accounting." The question would then be, "How does one do accounting?" The difference here is between "How much should I apply my knowledge?" and "I don't have the knowledge I need to apply, and do not even know where to begin in order to learn." It is the difference between trying to tackle an impossible task, and being helped to learn through "legitimate peripheral participation" in a community of practice, where learners have considerable agency in how and what they learn, and they themselves create new knowledge—as had been the case in the youth project.

Similarly, in contrast to Tagi's approach with outside aid and learning, what the youth project had accomplished by receiving help from Japan was to be able to work side-by-side with the two Japanese volunteers, and to learn via legitimate peripheral participation. The villagers listened to the Japanese volunteers and followed their directions as to how rice is grown in Japan. But even as they were following these directions they were already thinking about how the techniques would need to be altered to fit the local environment, local schedules, and other contextual factors. They were observing the progress of the rice sections they planted, which ones performed better than others, and comparing their observations with previous attempts to grow rice in the immediate area as well as with experiences planting other introduced crops. In West Kwara'ae villages over the past two decades we have often watched this process of trying out introduced techniques and altering them based on the observation and application of indigenous knowledge.

Villagers are pragmatic and oriented toward action. For them, learning involves doing and then drawing theoretical abstractions from the doing.

In other words, within indigenous epistemology, Kwara'ae villagers engage in *indigenous critical praxis*, critical reflection on culture, history, knowledge, politics, economics, and the sociopolitical contexts in which people themselves are living their lives; and then take the next step of acting on these critical reflections (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001). The debates in village meetings between members of the youth project and other villagers, including Tagi, illustrate the outcome of indigenous critical praxis among project members, who had learned not only to critique modernization-style development, but also to use those critiques creatively in their own designing and work in the project.

The strategies that Tagi used to attempt to resolve conflicts between his supporters and members of the youth project were part of his community development model. Rather than using indigenous strategies of resolving conflict, such as *fa'amanata'anga* as used by the youth project, he introduced a religious testimony approach. On Sunday mornings at the end of the church service, he would ask the priest for permission to go up the steps to the front, face the congregation, and give testimony regarding a conflict that happened that week between the two groups or individuals in the village. Then he would invite representatives from both sides to each give their own short testimony. After this, he told all of those who spoke to hug each other and weep. This style of conflict resolution was, of course, introduced by the missions, especially the more evangelical sects. Everyone in the village felt uncomfortable dealing with project disputes in this way. First, Kwara'ae is not traditionally a "hugging" society; shaking hands (another introduced behavior) is acceptable, and traditionally the exchange of food or other items would be involved in dispute resolution. Elders in particular felt uncomfortable with Tagi's strategies, as well as any women who had engaged in the village debates, because cross-gender hugging is customarily prohibited. The more appropriate indigenous strategy, if the church was involved, would be for the parties in dispute to visit the pastor or priest, or invite him to one of the homes, for a private reconciliation. Secondly, villagers felt that the sanctity of the church was violated by the testimonial kind of behavior around a secular issue, especially because there was a culturally prescribed appropriate context for disputes to be settled. In the context of the church, Tagi's idea was that God and everyone else would witness the reconciliation so as to seal the outcome once and for all. But many said, "What has God got to do with a village dispute over a rice project?! It's a secular issue."

DISCUSSION: WHOSE KNOWLEDGE?

The 'Oka Village Youth Project case presents us with important lessons about village factions, introduced versus indigenous knowledge, villagers' agency, and broader issues in rural education.

While conflict over land and resources throughout Malaita seems to be intensifying with population growth and modernization, the underlying causes of the 'Oka conflict had particular historical roots. 'Oka village was a product of missionization that lumped several clans and descent groups of varying sizes, seniority, power, education, and wealth into one unit. Because of long-standing disputes among village factions, it was susceptible to the kinds of power plays Tagi was adept at directing. Two decades before, another senior line had taken over, and ultimately destroyed, a similar local development project. Most of the time factions in the village do manage to get along. Tagi was leader of the largest and most senior ranked clan in the village, whereas the elders who were part of the 'Oka Village Youth Project were members of a smaller and much more junior descent group. The youth project elders tried to maintain their agency in the face of Tagi's challenge partly by claiming connection to another senior kin line outside the village—who willingly accepted the claimed link, but who could not intervene in the 'Oka village dispute because the land on which 'Oka village is built is not theirs.

As we have seen, the 'Oka Village Youth Project succeeded and grew so long as its members were able to guide their activities using indigenous knowledge and epistemology. It is important to emphasize that youth group members were not totally opposed to introduced knowledge. Rather, they knew that down the road as the project expanded, they would want to move into new, income-generating activities, such as the rice project they began about five years into their efforts. When they were ready for the rice project, they did not hesitate to seek outside guidance, and welcomed the Japanese volunteers who came to assist them. But the point is that in tackling these new activities requiring introduced information, they would grow from experience gained through activities that they already knew something about. One of the phrases they used to describe the project in its early years was that it was like *sukulu'anga* 'schooling': it was their way of getting an education. Although they used the Solomons Pijin word *sukulu*, they did not mean Anglo-European classroom learning. Rather, they used *sukulu* to mean the process of theorizing and creating knowledge—what we referred to earlier as indigenous epistemology. Their

project was rooted in indigenous epistemology and indigenous knowledge as the *fuli* 'foundation' and *to'ofūna* 'essence' of their work.

The 'Oka Village Youth Project illustrates the importance of indigenous knowledge and indigenous epistemology for manageable and significant development in rural areas of the Pacific Islands and in the Third World generally. We agree with Nyerere and others (1990; see opening quotation) that adapting new technological advances is important as part of an overall development plan in countries like the Solomons. But rural village-level development has a better chance of being sustainable, meaningful, and directly pertinent to people's immediate needs if it is grounded in their knowledge systems, as argued by Brohman (1996; see opening quotation) and many others recently. In the context of rural areas in the Solomons, this is certainly what villagers want, as members of the 'Oka Village Youth Project emphasized in interviews (see also Chaudhry 1999 for a parallel case). As Kwara'ae villagers often say, "I want a rural development model that will help me do something for myself here in the village, because this is where I am going to live and die." Introduced models, ironically even those purporting to anchor villagers' lives in the village, have only encouraged people to leave the village. That is because they teach people an introduced body of knowledge and a set of skills that are neither suitable nor relevant for the local environment (whatever outside experts may think).

However, knowledge itself, whatever its source, is not enough to ensure success. Villagers' agency is also essential. When Tagi took over the project and reorganized it, he disempowered villagers and the project ceased to be their own. The youth group members had collectively given birth to the 'Oka Village Youth Project out of their own planning and agency, and when Tagi intervened, they felt he killed the project. They had identified with their project as part of themselves, something from which they were learning, something that empowered them. His top-down management meant that project members went from working together like family members to being laborers, plantation-style. The youth group members were sensitive to this kind of labor organization. For elders in the project, it was a replay of their colonial and plantation experience.

With regard to broader issues in rural education, the failure of national schooling in the Solomons has been well documented (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992, 1994). The schools, with their emphasis on Anglo-European knowledge, inevitably prepare children for urban lifestyles and expectations. As most children fail or drop out of school after the early primary grades, they return to the village ill prepared for the rural life they must

lead. The 'Oka Village Youth Project was an effort to mitigate the negative influences of schooling that the youths, like many of the adults before them, had experienced; and to prepare the youths for a productive village life. The model of "community development" that Tagi and his supporters brought was, like national schooling, based on urban expectations and lifestyles. Rather than prepare youth for village life, it would only have encouraged them to eventually leave the village in search of more appropriate contexts in which to use their new skills and fulfill the new expectations they had developed. In contrast to national schools and Tagi's modernization version of community development, the 'Oka Village Youth Project members themselves were going to be responsible for their education, rather than being passive recipients and having education, knowledge, or information merely "deposited" in them, along the lines of Freire's (1970) critique of the "banking model" of education. This understanding is part of the *saka ma'i māna* 'emerge out of one's own hands' perspective in Kwara'ae indigenous epistemology with regard to *disflopmen*.

CONCLUSION: THE OUTCOME OF "COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT"

The self-definition of "indigenous" by and for indigenous peoples is related to the presence of strong communities that can ideally and materially offer sustenance to their members while also being able to reach out to others from their positions of strength. . . . The ways in which native peoples are giving form to the word "indigenous" so that it can do good work in the world should be cause for celebration rather than condemnation. After all, recognition of multicultures enriches. (Childs and Delgado-P 1999, 212)

Tagi and his supporters' orientation to "community development" was entirely economic, with no consideration for the problems of the youth. Adult members of the youth project argued, "How would a credit union keep youth in the village? They are restless and need something to be involved in physically." Tagi's vision also did not include the growth of knowledge on the part of participants, an aim that had been important to youth project members. Moreover, Tagi was interested in modernizing the village, not in encouraging youth to learn traditional culture. Ironically, the emphasis on modernization was guaranteed to encourage youth to leave the village for town, because it would increase rather than diminish their taste for Anglo-European lifestyle.

The failure of the 'Oka Village Youth Project due to Tagi's intervention

is bad enough. What is worse is what happened to the youths who were displaced. Feeling disempowered and disillusioned, most of them drifted to the urban center of Honiara, adding to the escalating unemployment rate of urban youth. Then, more recently, when the ethnic conflict led Malaitans living on Guadalcanal to form a militia, large numbers of 'Oka village youth joined. They were in the front lines of the worst fighting. Now that peace negotiations have seemingly halted the conflict, and 20,000 Malaitans have been driven back to Malaita, one wonders what will happen to these youth. Now that they have experienced the power that violence and guns can bestow, it is hard to imagine them fitting into village life again. And yet the final resolution of the conflict is likely to include restricting Malaitans from Honiara and Guadalcanal.

Our intent here is not to overly dramatize the tragedy of this case, or to romanticize village life. Our purpose has been to substantiate with data from a real case the arguments theorists have made about the importance of indigenous knowledge in development. Particularly, we have tried to show that it is not just indigenous knowledge that matters, but how that indigenous knowledge is theorized and constructed, and how it is applied—indigenous epistemology together with indigenous critical praxis. In contrast to a “rural development” guided by outdated modernization models and ideas, development that is meaningful to rural people must be built on knowledge resources villagers already have, and the strategies they know for expanding that knowledge.

* * *

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Notes

1 Examples of Pacific peoples who are still colonized include Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians), Māori (Aotearoa [New Zealand]), Aborigines (Australia), Tahitians, and the Kanaks (New Caledonia).

2 Our thinking about indigenous knowledge and epistemology has been greatly enriched by conversations over the past several years with Stephen T Boggs and John Moffat Fugui, to whom we are grateful.

3 Other island groups that were also excluded from colonial centralized devel-

opment include Santa Isabel, San Cristobal (now Makira), and the Santa Cruz islands (now Temotu Province). These island groups are rich in natural resources and have small populations; they could have been developed had development in the colonial British Solomon Islands Protectorate been less centralized.

4 Since the early twentieth century, colonial and national government labor and development policies have encouraged Malaitans' outmigration to Guadalcanal and the western Solomons. At the time of the onset of the ethnic conflict on Guadalcanal in 1998, thousands of Malaitans were living on Guadalcanal, many of whom had been born there. The presence of a large number of Malaitans on Guadalcanal, some as legal land owners and others as squatters, was one factor in the conflict.

5 We emphasize male youth over female youth because young women still play traditional roles in the home. This is not to say that young women are necessarily satisfied or happy. But typically when young women fail or drop out of school, they take up female roles in the household and then marry within a year or two. With the loss of the traditional men's house since missionization, young men have had no clear social role in their household of birth. Instead, it has become customary for young men to go off island for employment for a few years before returning home (if at all) and marrying. Many young men and women do not wish to marry so early but see themselves as having little other choice for a meaningful life, given the lack of educational and employment opportunities. Early marriage has increased population growth on Malaita; it also feeds into rural poverty, because couples are not financially prepared for the many children they inevitably have due to inadequate birth control methods and church doctrines and cultural proscriptions against birth control. Modern medicine also means that nearly all pregnancies go to term, and nearly all children born survive to adulthood. The foregoing points illustrate how issues are complexly entailed on Malaita. Although a fuller discussion is warranted, it goes beyond the scope of this article.

6 All names are pseudonyms.

7 The credit union was seen as "dead" partly because it was conceived as a way to make money. When the credit union movement came to Kwara'ae in the late 1970s, it was presented by outsiders as an alternative way of increasing wealth and speeding up development in rural areas. The convenience of a village-based source of loans for illiterate villagers was also idealized, and anticipated "interest rates" were exaggerated. In contrast, although also seen as "dead," banks have long been established in the Solomons, and because their interest rates are canceled out by service fees on the small accounts villagers might hold, they are seen by villagers simply as places to keep one's cash securely. Most villagers consider banks far safer than village credit unions, which in their experience have all failed, with the result that members lost their money. Much more could be said

here from a Kwara'ae standpoint. However, the point we want to make is that the variable history of the credit union movement in the rural Pacific illustrates the power of context, that is, of local conditions in determining the success or failure of ideas that seem on the surface to be inherently "good."

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Abstract

We show in this article how modernization, disguised as "community development," continues to fail rural villages in Solomon Islands despite the supposed movement toward a more people-centered, bottom-up philosophy in development education and practice. We focus on the case study of a Kwara'ae (Malaita island) rural, locally owned and operated project aimed at giving unemployed male youth a stake in the community and preventing their off-island migration. Successful for a decade, the project was destroyed by the intervention of a retired government official who, because of his education, training, and work with outside development agencies, imposed a modernization framework, including centralization of leadership and the valuing of Anglo-European knowledge over indigenous knowledge. While agreeing with the theoretical argument for indigenous knowledge in development, we argue that it is equally important that development be guided by people's indigenous epistemology/ies and indigenous critical praxis for (re)constructing and applying knowledge.

KEYWORDS: rural development, community development, youth, indigenous epistemology, Kwara'ae, Solomon Islands

