

The background of the cover is an abstract, marbled pattern. It features a dense mix of bright red, deep blue, and yellow-green colors, with some white and light blue areas. The colors are splattered and blended together, creating a textured, organic feel. The overall composition is vibrant and dynamic.

# *From the Deep*

## **PASIFIKI VOICES FOR A NEW STORY**

**Editors**

**James Bhagwan**

**Elise Huffer**

**Frances C. Koya-Vaka'uta**

**Aisake Casimira**



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“For whoever reads the dreams woven in these pages, please read with your heart. While comprehending the views expressed is paramount, feeling the emotions written within is essential, and hope it fuels your weaving for tomorrow. Action with no passion is undeserving of this gift we call life.”

*Rusila Nabouniu, 2020*



# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	x
<b>FOREWORD</b>	xii
<i>Konai H. Thaman</i>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	xv
<b>A VISION OF THE PACIFIC HOUSEHOLD</b>	
The Story of Our Pacific Household in the New Normal <i>Tevita Havea and the Pacific Church Leaders</i>	1
A Radical Consciousness is Essential <i>Roshika Deo</i>	13
He moemoea mo oku mokopuna . . . <i>Jenny Te Paa Daniel</i>	16
Imagining a New International Economic Order for the Pacific Islands <i>Transform Aqorau</i>	23
Keeping Scales Sensible and Sustainable: The Need for a Deeper Spirituality <i>Unaisi Nabobo-Baba</i>	28
Inspiring ‘Our Islands of Communities’ <i>Gordon Leua Nanau</i>	33
Back to the Future: Reappropriating Island Time and a Return to Kairos <i>James Bhagwan</i>	37
The Language of Trees and Clams <i>Wardley D. Barry-Igivisa</i>	49
<b>PACIFIC PHILOSOPHY, INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND THE ARTS</b>	
Pacific Indigenous Values Must Guide the Future <i>Vijay Naidu</i>	51
<i>HULIAU</i> : ‘Āina Aloha Economic Futures Declaration <i>Manulani Meyer, Ikaika Hussey and friends from Hawai’i</i>	53

<i>Kaveinga – Where is the Star Path?</i> <i>Seu’ula J. Fua, Kaumatua Parekura</i>	59
Respect for our Ancestors – Message to Our Oceanic Region <i>Suliana Siwatibau</i>	67
To Go Back is to Go Forward <i>Susana Tuisawau</i>	71
Our Source of Resilience and Sustainability: Indigenous knowledge, Skills and Art <i>Sashi Kiran</i>	75
Our New Story Must Value our Diverse Pasifiki Philosophies <i>Tevita Tonga Mohenoa Puloka</i>	80
Our Knowledge as Resilience in Change <i>Fetaomi Tapu-Qiliho</i>	84
Reclaim our Distinctive and Pacific Identities <i>Theresa Fox</i>	89
Embrace our Indigenous Knowledge in our New Story <i>Maina Taliafua</i>	92
Remember our Collective Welfare Culture <i>L.K.M.T</i>	94
The Prayer in a Yam Year in Yam Cultures of Papua New Guinea <i>Rosa Koian</i>	99
Weaving to Learn and Learning to Weave <i>‘Anaseini T. Ulakai</i>	104
<i>Hathat Se Puku ka Hā’hā’se Pupu: Envisioning a Multi-tasking Oceania</i> <i>Wilfer Afrete Rigamoto</i>	108
<i>Taha he Kehe – Unity in Diversity</i> <i>Hūfanga He Ako Moe Lotu, ‘Ōkusitino Māhina</i>	110
Weaving the Oceania New Normal: Thoughts on an Epistemology and Praxis of Liberation <i>David Gegeo</i>	124
What is the future for the Arts in Post COVID-19 Pacific Island States? <i>Lingikoni E. Vaka’uta</i>	133

## SPIRITUALITY, THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

Another World is Possible <i>Peter Loy Chong</i>	137
God is Committed to Earth – Our Common Home <i>Cliff Bird</i>	143
Living Simply and Cherishing Life <i>Frances Namoumou</i>	149
A Balanced World for Our Pacific <i>Alisia Evans</i>	151
<i>Tatadra ni Veisiga ni Mataka: Dreams of Tomorrow</i> <i>Rusila Nabouniu</i>	154
A New Spirituality for the New Story? <i>Jovili Meo</i>	156
'Oceania Man,' 'Oceania Woman' and Communal Resolve are Key to any New Story <i>Maiava Iulai Toma</i>	163
Relearn Kindness, Living off the Land, and Oceania Cooperation <i>'Ilaisaane 'Olivia Tu'itupou</i>	165
A Story based on Spirituality and Indigenous Knowledge <i>William Maezema</i>	168
The Common Good of Justice and Compassion <i>Raki Mamao Tigarea</i>	170
We Need a New Story for a New Normal <i>Vilimaina Naqeleuvuki</i>	172
Listen to Our Spiritualities and Cultures <i>Johnny Albert</i>	174
A Quarantined Easter Experience <i>Mosese Ma'ilo</i>	179
Reclaiming Jesus' Prayer for Unity <i>Apimeleki Qiliho</i>	182

**EDUCATION PHILOSOPHIES, SYSTEMS AND MENTORING**

The Dance of Relationality: Vision of a Pacific Itulagi Education for Life <i>Upolu Lumā Vaai</i>	185
We will know we have arrived when we hear the ancestors sing   A Necessary Reset <i>Frances C. Koya-Vaka’uta</i>	191
Vision for Pacific Islands Education (Fiji and Rotuma) <i>Manuie Vilsoni</i>	198
Innovate Education – Nature as Teacher <i>Ann Kloulechad-Singee</i>	201
Re-grounding Theological Education to be Practical and Liberating <i>Geraldine Varea Wiliame</i>	207
<i>Rakoa Aga</i> – Cultural Education <i>Joshua Vincent Olsen Sopapelu Tarterani</i>	210

**DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMICS, ENVIRONMENT, GENDER AND HEALTH**

Economics of Wellbeing for a Sustainable and Resilient Pacific <i>Jack Urame</i>	217
Weaving New Development Paths for the Pacific <i>Tarsicius Kabutaulaka</i>	220
Flatten the Curve on Social and Economic Inequalities <i>Emele Morgan</i>	225
Islands of Hope – Vision for the Future of the Pacific Region <i>Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi</i>	231
Integrated Ecological Accounting <i>Arnie Saiki</i>	241
Back to the Future: Life after COVID-19 <i>Martyn Namorong</i>	245
Oceania’s Prosperity of Tomorrow Depends on Sustainability Today <i>Vaelupemaua Junior Kirstin Uatisono II</i>	251
Rethinking Ecology from a Multicoloured Lens <i>Iemaima Va’ai</i>	254

The Pacific and My Fiji of Tomorrow <i>Emele Duituturaga</i>	257
An Ecological Vision of the Future <i>Alisi Rabukawaqa</i>	263
Chasing after a New Covenant A Gender Diverse Perspective on the <i>New Normal</i> <i>Benjamin V. Patel</i>	265
As a Young Samoan Woman, Grant me Justice <i>Temukisa Kaneshia Tuliaupupu</i>	270
Re-assesing Pacific Health and Human Rights <i>Daphney Kiki</i>	272
Our New Story Must Prioritise Health and Wellbeing <i>Fuata Varea Singh</i>	276
Rise Up, Guardians of the Pacific <i>Pat Visanti SSC</i>	278
<b>GOVERNANCE, POLITICS, LEADERSHIP AND LAW</b>	
Learning from the Butterfly? <i>Kabini Sanga</i>	281
New and Old: Visionaries, Courage and Commitment <i>Jione Havea</i>	285
Corruption Free Leadership in Papua New Guinea <i>Joshua Osborne Iagata</i>	288
Transformational Leadership is Essential for the Future <i>Ilaitia Tamata</i>	290
Weaving the New Normal: Envisioning a Post-COVID-19 Oceania <i>Lopeti Senituli</i>	295
A Fijian Vision for Pacific Regional Self-determination and Cooperation <i>Jone Dakuvula</i>	302
In Solidarity We Stand – Towards a New Oceanic-European Partnership <i>Vincent Gewert</i>	317
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	319

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The initiative was initially prompted by Ms Rosa Koian, the editor of the *Tok Pisin* newspaper in Papua New Guinea, with her statement "Time for Action" contained in an e-mail message she wrote and sent in March 2020 to members and friends who are involved in the Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) initiative. The CALL FOR VISIONS was then proposed by Associate Professor Elise Huffer as an action that members and friends of the REM initiative could pursue during the coronavirus pandemic lockdown period. Because the initiative falls within the ambit of the REM initiative, it became a joint project of PTC, PCC and OCACPS. The initiative was then implemented by a team of dedicated staff of the Institute for Mission and Research (IMR) based at PTC, and members and friends of the REM initiative who were available and had volunteered their time.

The following pages contain the deeply held beliefs, translated into visions and aspirations, of the authors, all of whom are rooted in their country and cultural contexts. In that regard, this is more than an acknowledgement. With deep gratitude and the collective graciousness of our spirit, we honour the emotions and sentiments with which the authors audaciously penned their contributions, often with great poignancy, to tell their stories from the depth of their life experiences. In truth, this publication is theirs and is a part of their sacred story, just as it is a part of our region's sacred narrative. The authors of each vision statement are the main contributors to this publication, and represent a wide range of professions, work experiences, academic disciplines and interests, country and development experiences. Much of what is captured in this publication is owed to their insights and views. The three institutions are deeply indebted to them.

Rev. Professor Dr. Upolu Luma Va'ai, the Principal of PTC, Rev. James Bhagwan, the General Secretary of PCC, and Associate Professor Dr. Frances C. Koya-Vaka'uta, the Director of OCACPS, as Heads of their respective institutions, are duly acknowledged for their institutional endorsements and mentoring support, guidance and invaluable contributions to the publication. Without their institutional support, it is difficult to see how this publication would be possible.

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It is the fervent hope of the three institutions that this publication will be received as a genuine attempt to assist our political, religious and traditional leaders in discerning with their people the trajectory of their respective countries' development paths, and collectively that of the region.

## **The Editors**

# FOREWORD

As someone whose weaving skills are restricted to making simple fans and wastepaper baskets, and whose life experience with the ocean is limited to gathering shellfish at low tide, being asked to write a Foreword to this multifaceted and multi-layered ‘Reweaving the Ecological Mat’ sponsored book was an honour as well as a huge challenge. Reading all the 60+ contributions contained in it, as it turned out, would require a longer lockdown period in which to digest what each amazing author shared through his or her writing.

An interesting and important aspect of this book is the fact that almost all of the contributors are people of the Pacific Ocean (or Moana as an alternative marker), and many, like me, had to endure learning (and teaching for some) in the language of strangers (or colonialists as some would quickly point out) for a large part of their lives. This is an important part of the new story that many of us are telling these days, and it includes the realisation that there is much to be learned from our own traditional knowledge (indigenous and local knowledge), expressed in our own languages (vernacular). Such knowledge gives relevance to our teaching and research, although sometimes meaning is lost when we try to translate our findings, thoughts and feelings into mainstream languages such as English or French. For example, we may ask, ‘what are the vernacular terms in one’s language for concepts such as sustainable development, environment, spirituality, governance, or education for that matter? And how do we conceptualise context-specific terms such as relationality, interconnectedness, leadership, governance or resilience? These questions and more provide the authors of this publication with the commitment and motivation to share their thoughts and experiences about important issues facing Pasifiki people today as they grapple with life-changing events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The various issues discussed by the authors are organised thematically, making it easy for the reader to find issues related to each theme and the authors of each exposition. As I read the various pieces, I began thinking of old and new themes that I have mused about during the last four decades since joining the University of the South Pacific, and I have wondered how these themes became the inspiration for each of the authors. I thank the authors for raising these issues and I list some of them here because I believe they are worthy of further exploration and consideration by all Pasifiki thinkers. They include: gifts of Pacific experiences and dreams; baskets within bigger global baskets of life and living sustainably; the interconnectedness of all things; forgiveness

of wrongdoing towards other people and nature; need for a revolutionary movement to restore faith in humanity; sacred spaces marred by the import of foreign ideas and models of development; learning from teachers who are role models of appropriate behaviour and not just facilitators of knowledge creation or memorisation; reclaiming the concept of ‘enough’ – *fe’unga* (and, I may add, usefulness – *‘aonga*); a call for inclusive and flexible development where everyone is valued, irrespective of socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation; redefining and reclaiming spirituality; reclaiming indigenous knowledge, including notions of time and space; drawing attention to shared Pasifiki values such as *vaa* (relationships), loyalty, respect, compassion, and a sense of community expressed in Pasifiki languages; development that prioritises people rather than money and wealth being measured by the degree of giving/sharing rather than receiving and accumulating material things; and many more.

All of the authors have given a great deal of thought to their reflections and I congratulate them for that. One issue that caught my eye relates to the theme of the resilience of our Pasifiki people and communities. We know of course and tend to argue all the time about the differences between Pasifiki traditional pedagogies as compared to school learning, and how numeracy and literacy have become the catchphrases of modern school classrooms for some time now. In her article, Koya-Vaka’uta introduces the notion of Resilience Literacies, and I quote here because she puts it in clear and convincing words. She explains resilience literacies as “the essence of holistic wellness and emotional intelligence critical for mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. It emphasises the inevitability of uncertainty and change, the need for adaptability and the importance of critical and creative thinking for effective problem-solving ... it comprises core attributes (personal characteristics) and basic competencies (physical/intellectual abilities) which contribute to an innate ability to adapt or respond to change. Central to this idea of Pacific resilience is a deep spirituality or sense of connectedness. This spiritual self nurtures self-love and worth, and recognises the relationality that underpins all Pacific indigenous values and practices. It reinforces an inherent connection to land, sky and sea and reaffirms interdependence with all other forms of life, past, present and future, including flora and fauna, the ancestors and future generations to come, as well as acknowledgement of a higher being.”

This description of the ideal New Normal for education, I believe, provides the foundation upon which all the other ideal new life and development models are flagged by almost all of the contributing authors in this book. Resilience

literacies gather together what some of us have been speaking and writing about in conferences, seminars, conversations and other forms of communication in the past three decades or so, and in several movements such as the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative, the Pacific Philosophies conferences, the OCACPS seminar series, as well as local and national initiatives by higher education institutions and NGOs throughout our region. This publication reaffirms Pacific peoples' determination to recreate and redefine different motifs for weaving their life stories, their dreams, as well as their arts and heritage and how they relate to one another and to nature. I congratulate the book's authors and editors for this timely gift of love and call for action towards a better world.

This publication is also timely for another reason. This year Pacific Theological College (PTC) celebrates its fifty fifth (55<sup>th</sup>) year as the region's premier theological college. In light of its new direction on education for justice, innovative ideas on contextual theological education, and its bold move to transit to university status in the next three years, it is, therefore most appropriate that PTC is the publisher of this collection of visions. I take this opportunity to wish its leadership, faculty, students, staff and their families God's blessings!

Congratulations again to the writers for sharing yourselves and your dreams through your writings.

*What was it you thought  
When the moon swam out of the sea  
I thought I caught a glimpse of you*

*When was the first time  
Birds learnt to fly  
I know it was when  
I began to write.*

*(Take Off, Langakali, p.4)*

‘Ofa atu

**Professor Konai H. Thaman**

# INTRODUCTION

While the resilience of Pacific communities is more and more recognised and credited, it is at the same time deeply vulnerable. This resilience is sustained by indigenous models and frameworks of ecological wellbeing; economic production and distribution; the close spiritual connection between people, land and sea which protects rather than exploits the environment; and the existence of cultural and spiritual values and morals that serve to guide governance practices and strengthen social cohesion and community sustainability. The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the region's multifaceted risks related, not only to global economic crisis and ecological vulnerability but also, in a positive way, the resilience of Pacific communities.

However, this resilience is today being challenged by the preference for development models and educational systems that underpin most economic and national development plans of Pacific island states. These have negative impacts on the natural environment, social cohesion and sustainability of communities, security, governance and spirituality. This agenda affects development policies and practices in the region, as well as approaches to building peace and justice, and relations with the environment. While the severity of development problems varies among Pacific island countries, there are common elements among them. The predominant one is the emerging ecological crisis. For most Pacific indigenous communities, ecology means much more than the natural environment. It is about a myriad of intricate relationships of people, land, forest and sea, and the norms (most often unwritten) that govern, connect and link them into a web of sustaining life and meaning. It is about the framework, norms and values that guide this intricate web of relationships. Much of this framework relates to how communities are to relate to their natural environment and the governing norms on the use of land, forest and sea resources. In most Pacific indigenous communities, there is always in existence an interdependent view of human beings' place in creation, their reliance on the natural environment for sustenance, and conversely their responsibility to protect and conserve.

In light of the above, Pacific Theological College, in partnership with the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, with the support of friends and partners, embarked on a project entitled *Reweaving the Ecological Mat* (REM) as a response to the ruptures in the ecological wellbeing of Pacific people. The ecological crisis is fundamentally about the whole of life and the linkages between the human community, development and the environment. It also

points out the uncomfortable scenario that the ecological crisis which the world, and in particular the Pacific, is now facing cannot be solved by scientific and technical knowledge and money alone; it needs the contribution of indigenous and faith-based ecological frameworks (knowledge, ethics and practices) to finding alternative solutions to developmental issues.

This is not simply about global warming, and consequently, climate change as such, but about the unchecked intrusion of human beings, often driven by greed for wealth and power, into the delicate balance of the natural environment, from indiscriminate logging and mining to unhealthy and wasteful consumption. It argues that indigenous and faith-based ecological frameworks have much to contribute to addressing the ecological crisis. This project is about addressing the ruptures in the ecological balance within the human community and the natural environment. Specifically, the project is research and development oriented, with the envisaged outcome of churches and their communities developing ecological indicators, both as measures of their own development progress, and resilience, and as a tool to monitor and assess their respective governments' development policies and projects. The development of the ecological indicators involves the weaving into these indicators indigenous and faith-based ecological principles, and the development of a methodology for the process.

This publication substantiates and provides the rationale for the REM initiative. It presents a consensus on the rationale for the REM initiative – from all parts of the Pacific region; from men and women; from the old and the young; from a diversity of genders; from those considered indigenous to the region and those whose ancestors came to make their home in the islands (whether by choice or under slavery conditions); from academics and young professionals to high school, vocational and university students; and from development workers to church ministers, bishops and pastors.

The consensus is that the development narrative in our region needs to change. All of the visions articulated here, without exception, present the deeply felt need for a revolutionary change to our development story. We need, in Roshika Deo's words, a "Radical Consciousness" in relation to education, militarism, economics, physical and mental health, gender, food security, exchange of knowledge, and experiences of culture and spirituality in our region. In essence, she says what many of us are already feeling: "We must resist going back to an unequal and unjust world that was not functioning for most of us." At the end

of her statement, she includes this incomplete sentence: “We are a revolution waiting to happen...” Each of us, as individuals and collectively, must complete this sentence.

In the first section, under the title “A Vision of the Pacific Household,” Tevita Havea outlines very well, in a passionate and poignant way, the concerns of the Pacific churches about development, politics, ecology and ecumenism (the relationship among the churches in the Pacific). As he truthfully says, “The social statistics worldwide reveal a world of senseless tragedies – extreme hunger and poverty, war and violence, and irreversible environmental damages and ocean pollution. All of these amidst a world of execrable and unimaginable plenty, tremendous strides in education and knowledge, and growth in democratic governance, development and freedoms.” He then argues forcefully for us in the region to script our own story, saying that “[u]nless we do this, development and its current measures will continue to favour the few and disadvantage the many among us, and the ‘normal’ that will be the story of the New Normal. We as leaders – church, political and traditional – must script this aspect of our story together; it cannot be otherwise. This is our task, not someone else’s.”

Similarly, Jenny Te Paá highlights the “... fervent belief that as peoples of the Pacific, we can do so much better as we turn now to face the future with extraordinarily clean hands and with far more open hearts! Even as we struggle to comprehend the rapidity of change and, understandably, to somewhat resist the overwhelming prospect of so much that is yet unknown, we must also remind ourselves that, as God’s Pacific peoples, we have a duty of care to the pristine environment we are blessed to call home... We are being called in this moment to commit, with renewed vigour, to addressing all of those injustices which give rise to human suffering, and to working tirelessly towards a more just, more equitable and more inclusive future.”

Transform Aqorau proposes the idea of establishing a new economic order that will service the economic and trade needs of our island countries. He says, “I would like to imagine that, in a new international order for the region, we develop our own economic bubble, wherein we become a single customs, trade and development block in which we see ourselves more as peoples of this single union, working to help and support each other...” To facilitate this, he puts forward the idea of a Pacific Islands Parliament: “The current features of regional cooperation would have to be transformed in this new international economic paradigm through the establishment of a Pacific Islands Parliament

which would be a regulatory authority for customs, trade, investments and the setting of common environmental standards for the extractive industries involving our terrestrial and oceanic resources.”

Gordon Nanau explains that “The Pacific cannot be described in any other way but as an ‘Ocean connecting all our islands of communities.’ This is the Pacific Manifesto!” This is an interconnected community in which, in Unaisi Nabobo-Baba’s words, “[t]here is a need for ecological balance, and we must enforce ecological justice via education policies at all levels, in our laws and development policies. Wherever we are, we must all work towards this one goal – sustainable ecological balance!” We will need to be responsible for tomorrow, and we will need to prepare a future for our children; that is our present responsibility. As James Bhagwan says in his article, “[a]t the heart of these visions are hopes for the future. A future we may prepare our children for, but not see ourselves. With this in mind, perhaps instead of reflecting on the world we have inherited and must live in today and tomorrow, we need to focus on the world that we will leave for others to inherit.” Underlying all this, a young man from Papua New Guinea, Wardley Barry-Igivisa, in a most beautiful and poetic way, sums up the spirituality with which we can all resonate, weaving not only our values but also, in practice, what our ancestors lived before us: lifestyles based on the principles of ‘enough,’ sustainability, resilience and interconnectedness.

The second section of this publication is titled “Pacific Philosophy, Indigenous Knowledge, and the Arts.” Beginning with Vijay Naidu, and including Manulani Meyer, Ikaika Hussey and friends from Hawai’i, Suliana Siwatibau, Susana Tuisawau, and the youth and elders’ contributors to this section, all insist that our distinctive Pacific philosophies and indigenous knowledge, including the arts, must be the basis of the new story that we are going to script. Sashi Kiran sums up this section well when she says: “In a world where capitalism, especially the neoliberal economics of the past forty years, commodifies human relationships, our region is still blessed with strong kinships and relationships – people with the land and sea, and with each other across the Pacific. Simple living kept them in a harmonious relationship with nature. This is what sustained our people. It was the legacy and the ‘capital’ that was passed down through the generations... Without seeking validation from the outside world, we need to learn to be proud of our heritage... We owe it to our future generations to be able to hold our leaders accountable for the decisions they make, and the values and principles of indigenous and local knowledge and experiences.” Two of our eminent elders and academics, Huƒanga He Ako Moe Lotu Professor Mahina and Dr. David Gegeo, provide us with valuable insights into the philosophy of the *vaa* and

Pacific epistemology. In many respects, these eminent elders highlight a key aspect in relation to our Pasifiki knowledge systems – education. In addition, Hufanga He Ako Moe Lotu Professor Mahina, argues a strong case for *Tāvāism* as an Indigenous Tongan (and Moana Oceania) general philosophy of reality, based on *tā* and *vā*, time and space, as the common medium of existence. He reflects upon the deeply embedded philosophical phenomenon of *Hoaism/Soaism* as inseparable yet indispensable pairs of equal and opposite binaries, such as unity and diversity, time and space, person and place, knowledge and skill, and state of emergency and state of normality. As plural but complex states of affairs in reality as in nature, mind, and society, they are, in turn, symmetrically mediated through sustained harmony and beauty, transforming them from a condition of crisis to a situation of stasis, as in the case of both COVID-19 and climate change.

The third section, on “Spirituality, Theology, and History,” underscores the fundamental role of spirituality in our new story. It is deeply gratifying to see that the collection of contributions in this section is a mixture of Christian and indigenous values, theology and history. What is extremely important to recognise is that by deliberately placing all of these together in this section, one is confronted with the view that spirituality is more than just the church and the Christian tradition. It is fundamentally about life, how we conceive it to be and how we live it. The first three submissions in this section are about the moral teachings of the church on globalisation – why it is a narrative that we should critique, the Bible’s view on it, and what economics and development ought to be about.

The last two contributions in this section explain the correlation between the first Easter and the Easter celebration this year, as both were celebrated in quarantine, behind closed doors. The first Easter event gave birth to what is now the largest religious movement in the world. It remains to be seen what this year’s quarantined Easter event will give birth to. But in our endeavour to birth a new vision, a new story, it is also stressed that unity (not uniformity) is fundamental to bringing about that new story. The Christian faith being one of our fundamental resources as Pacific people, the call for the churches to live out the prayer of Jesus for unity is most essential.

In between these biblical and theological visions are articles about spirituality in its broadest sense. These submissions, from the young and the elders, underscore our Pacific understanding that spirituality is not the preserve of the church or the Christian faith, or any other religion. It is the crux of our lives,

seen mostly in the values we hold and live by each day. The young Fijian woman Rusila Nabouniu, in a most poetic way, explains the ebb of our journey away from our spirituality and our return, not empty-handed but with experiences of the ‘bright lights’ which we will now use to help us to weave much more serious relationships with our past, our present, our future, and our Creator. She says: “Yesterday the village was grey and dull; the life of the village went to see the bright lights and never returned. But now they will return; they will breathe new life into the village. They will learn the old ways because it is key to understanding the new tomorrow. They will weave their experience of the bright lights into their dreams of tomorrow, and from these dreams strong trees will grow at the edge of the forest. The strong trees will guard and provide for all living things again. The forest remembers its duty given by the Creator.”

Section four, on “Education Philosophies, Systems and Mentoring,” is placed in the middle of the contents listing – between the sections on the household vision, indigenous knowledge and spirituality, and the sections on development and governance. The purpose for this is to highlight education as the key, the bridge between visions, actions and change, and to bring to life the yearnings for a new development story for our region. But to be effective in our education efforts, we need and must rethink the philosophical basis of our education systems and models. Upolu Va’ai is absolutely correct in saying that “[e]ducation is a relationship, not a mere academy.” And our system of training teachers is, unwittingly, as colonial as it was in the colonial era. To counter this, we should consider adopting the philosophy of teacher training as “... more about *relating* and *mentoring* than teaching, woven into the everyday mentorship structure of life [which] allows us to learn enough to learn that we do not know enough.”

In light of the above, governments, religious organisations and education policy and decision makers in the region need to see teachers as ‘mentors’ rather than ‘teachers.’ This is because educators, in Va’ai’s view, “are pathfinders who assist communities to find their life-affirming paths – a path that should lead to an auguring vision for education that is *life-driven* rather than market-driven.” This shift in conceptualising who and what is a teacher will make a tremendous difference to the learning experiences of our children in the Pacific. It will certainly contribute to strengthening the resilience and capacity-building of our people.

Cresantia Frances Koya-Vaka’uta presents what she calls “Resilience Literacies,” which Professor Konai Thaman has expanded on in her Foreword. Other contributors to this section emphasise the need to review the existing

educational curriculum and structure to include life-skills learning, where half of the school week is spent on theory and the other half on learning and experiencing life-skills and indigenous knowledge. This includes the proposal by Joshua Vincent Olsen Sopapelu Tarterani, for what he calls “culture education.” The inclusion of nature in the example of Palau, in both the structure and content of curriculum, is a prime example of the practicality of Pacific education systems. It is in this framework of learning that theological education, as argued by Geraldine Wiliame, must “... rethink the current theological educational model undertaken in our own Pacific islands.”

In section five, “Development: Economics, Health, Gender and Environment,” the consensus of all contributors is that we need a new narrative that will explain development to us, and which we will define. This section contains rich and deep reflections on the current state of our regional development realities. The development story prior to the coronavirus pandemic had become untenable, and all the contributors to this section make strong statements in this regard. “We cannot afford to go back to the way things were prior to COVID-19. It is untenable and dangerous... We must find our own development pathways,” says Tarcisius Kabutaulaka. One of the ways we do this is through our subsistence economy, which Jack Urame and others in this section highlight. There are practical solutions provided, which are included in the vision of the Islands of Hope and the related strategies proposed.

In addition, one of the exciting ideas proposed is ‘ecological accounting’ as perhaps the most proper and relevant measure for our development and progress in our region. It takes into account the cultural and spiritual value of our ecology and how this should be factored into our national accounts. The benefits and losses incurred on our biodiversity also contribute to the diminishing or enhancing of our wellbeing. This kind of measure of our national and regional development is revolutionary, because it advances the idea that at the centre of development is the wellbeing of the human person and the environment. This puts into proper perspective our place in the ecology of things; the wellbeing of our household is dependent on the wellbeing of everyone and everything in our household.

Other contributors continue to pose the most relevant question: *What should our development narrative be?* Agriculture, education and women are key development issues for us in the region to address. But in our attempt to weave a new development narrative, we need to return to a worldview that is multi-dimensional. As the young Samoan woman, Iemaima Va’ai says, “[o]ur Pacific

cultures were founded on [a] multicoloured and multi-dimensional worldview, where we included earth as our family. We saw the land as kin and relative, and we rendered it much respect, as we would with the elders in our communities. This was how our lives maintained harmony and balance.” This worldview, which embraces the multiplicity of relationships, includes gender. Make no mistake, our narrative on gender is nothing like the narrative that is propagated by the current development model. Our narrative does not differentiate between genders. Such differentiation is absent from our languages and dialects. Our new development story must therefore be all-embracing of all our diversities, including our gender diversity, and honour what we were, what we have become, and what we will be.

In section six, “Governance, Politics, Leadership and Law,” the contributors share their visions on leadership mentoring. Our Elder Kabini Sanga has a beautiful way of expressing this leadership mentoring, comparing it to the phases of the evolution of a butterfly. Leadership requires commitment to ensure life not only for ourselves and our people but for the ocean and land. It also requires courage to re-imagine a different world of economics, to critique the colonial mindset, and to propose new visions. The young Papua New Guinean, Joshua Iagata, sums up well the cost of bad leadership and governance. He says: “Corruption is one of the biggest development issues in my country that affects all levels of society. It threatens sustainable economic development, our society’s ethical values and justice, it destabilises our society and endangers the rule of law. It threatens the institutions and values of our democracy. Grassroots people suffer most the harmful effects of corruption because public policies and resources that are largely for their benefit are abused by corrupt leaders.”

In order to address such governance and leadership dilemmas, a programme on transformational leadership is proposed. Such initiatives, especially in grooming and mentoring our young people, are essential for the future of our region. Also relevant in the new story of development for our region is international relations. Lopeti Senituli proposes a constructive way to conduct such international relations, and Jone Dakuvula critiques and proposes possible alternatives around which national policies on the ocean can be written. The contributions of these two seasoned and highly knowledgeable contributors stimulate both discussion and action. It is also a delight to read the concern of a young German man regarding his vision on the Pacific’s partnership with Europe. He strongly emphasises that such partnerships must be based on mutual respect and principles of self-determination.

It is indeed a daunting task to summarise and present accurately each contributor's vision submission. In selecting certain points from some of the authors, the aim is to highlight critical ideas that demand our attention. What is briefly outlined above barely touches the depth of thought and wisdom of each contributor's vision. We should let their contributions speak for themselves, because their thoughts are written from a sacred space and filled with a spirit of generosity. We simply need to be in their presence.

## **The Editors**



# A VISION OF OUR PACIFIC HOUSEHOLD

## **The Story of Our Pacific Household in the New Normal**

*Tevita Havea*



“We cannot be where we wish to be unless we reframe and script a story about ourselves, who we are, and our journey as people of the Pacific in the New Normal.”

The year 2020 will mark a turning point in the history of our islands; from how we understand ecumenism, ecology and politics to how we understand development. This is our story, as Pacific church leaders, church members, and political and traditional leaders in the ‘Household of God in the Pacific.’

But first we wish to acknowledge with deep respect and gratitude the many, both here in our Pacific region and around the world, who are risking their lives to attend to those who are infected by the coronavirus. In this regard, we pay tribute to our doctors and nurses, volunteers and counsellors. To those who have lost their loved ones, we offer our sincere condolences, and our prayer is that you will find peace, comfort and fortitude in God's love and care. To those who are fearful and uncertain, we offer to you our vision for our region, namely that, if we work together, even with our fears and uncertainties, we will be offering to our children a much better story, which they can then share with their children in the journey ahead. We also acknowledge the tremendous work of the governments, churches, civil society organisations and countless volunteers who attended to the needs of our people in the aftermath of the recent Cyclone Harold in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga.

The impact of the coronavirus, while deeply tragic on the one hand, offers us a unique opportunity to envision life anew. The Easter events this year made this envisioning highly significant. The social statistics worldwide reveal a world of senseless tragedies – extreme hunger and poverty, war and violence, and irreversible environmental damage and ocean pollution. All of these are occurring amidst a world of execrable and unimaginable plenty, tremendous strides in education and knowledge, and growth in democratic governance, development and freedoms. Never before has our world been so blessed with creativity and ingenuity, yet so vexed by our foolishness in believing that there are no limits to our powers and to what we can do. The coronavirus or COVID-19, in a most striking and startling way, has revealed this folly. It lays bare and shatters the poignant illusion of this 'normal' and its 'inevitability' that the world and we in the region have taken for granted.

The Easter events – the death and resurrection of our Lord – show that neither death nor fate has the final say regarding our human condition; we are and do have the final say. Let us then begin to craft our vision of the New Normal with the words of the late Bernard Narokobi, an elder in our ecumenical movement and a founding father of the state of Papua New Guinea:

*Our history did not begin with contact with the Western explorers. Our civilisation did not start with the coming of the Christian missionaries. Because we have an ancient civilisation, it is important for us to give proper dignity and place to our history. We can only be ourselves if we accept who we are rather than denying our autonomy... Now that*

*we are finally connected with the world, we suddenly see ourselves through the world mirror. Will we see our own true size images, or will we see ourselves in the images and the shadows of others? Will we see ourselves in the long shadows of the dwindling light and the advanced darkness of the evening dusk, or will we see ourselves in the long and radiant rays of the rising sun? We can choose, if we will (cited in Zorn 2010).*

These are truthful words, and although these were about Melanesian history and the need for Melanesians to reframe and claim ownership of it, they have highly significant relevance for the rest of us today, and for our story as Pacific peoples in the New Normal – the post-coronavirus world. Knowing who we are and our distinctive histories, valuing and celebrating our diversity and what is common to us must be fundamental to our story of the New Normal. Let us map out a

new way of living and relating to each other. Let us draw from the wealth of resources in our cultural and faith traditions, and our hermeneutical experiences about God and what God is saying to us. In the following paragraphs, we as Pacific church leaders propose a vision for our journey.

***“Never before has our world been so blessed with creativity and ingenuity, yet so vexed by our foolishness in believing that there are no limits to our powers and to what we can do. The pandemic, in a most striking and startling way, has revealed this folly. ”***

### **Ecumenism**

Back in 2013 in Honiara, Solomon Islands, we undertook a journey of ecumenical renewal, and the questions that have been asked during the journey were these: *Who are we, as an ecumenical family, in this new century? To whom and to what should we owe the reservoir of our Christian compassion, our resources on justice, the burden of our identity as cultured Christians, and our moral responsibility?* The ecumenical relations

of our fathers and mothers from the 1960s to the 1980s were marked by the strength of their solidarity and action for justice, freedom and the development of our people. That is the example we must follow, and our discernment and actions must be inspired by the Spirit of the Lord. This task is urgent because if we fail to genuinely make the effort to understand the root causes of injustice, aggression, conflict, climate change, what makes people despair, and what

renders them vulnerable to the cruel forces of nature and violence, we will be unable to create a life-giving New Normal for our people. We need to recover our earlier ecumenical vision of ‘solidarity and action for justice, freedom and the development of our people’ in order to chart our story of the New Normal.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, there was the illusion that a new ecumenical identity could simply be constructed on a foreign model. And so it was. Regional and local ecumenical institutions were built on a borrowed model that is driven by a certain cultural and theological framing of John 17:21. It served a purpose then. But it was a mistake to think that it ought to remain so. Practices since the turn of the century have shown that a new ecumenical identity did not and will not simply appear, nor will it develop according to what has been prescribed by models designed somewhere else, nor by mechanically copying other regions’ ecumenical models and assuming that they will work in perpetuity. The time when ready-made ecumenical models could be installed in other regions, like a computer programme, has passed.

Our forefathers and mothers read the stars back then and came up with structures, albeit borrowed from the Western world, to govern our ecumenical life and relations. Today, it is our turn to read the stars and gift to the future our version of this aspect of our story of the New Normal. But our reading must be framed and conditioned by our experiences, our cultures and traditions, our worldviews, and our hermeneutics of the biblical story. Only then will our identity be solid in its foundation and directed towards the future and not the past. This endeavour started with the church leaders at their various meetings – in Auckland and Nadi in 2017, and with the PNG churches in Goroka in 2016 and 2017. These conversations enabled a shift in understanding ecumenism, from the ‘unity of the body of Christ’ to the ‘Household of God.’ The deepening of this shift, through education and practices of this understanding, is much more relevant today.

***“We will need to factor into the measures of our national and regional progress our ecological assets, which include the losses and damage to our environment, aspects of our cultures and traditions, and our relationships. And conversely, we must factor in the benefits of emerging ecological relationships with our environment, ocean and political relations.”***

We have left behind an old prescribed model of ecumenism, and we should not return to it. Ecumenism as the ‘Household of God in the Pacific’ is our story of ecumenism in the New Normal. We must seek new ways of doing and teaching theology, mission, history, liturgy and biblical studies that will give meaning to our Pacific household.

### **Ecology**

A politician, philosopher, theologian and, above all, a faithful servant of his people and God, the Solomon Islander Rev. Leslie Boseto once said, “As Christians we are obliged to be good stewards of God’s creation, and today more than ever, we ... must make informed decisions about how to conserve and sustainably develop our natural environment to ensure our children enjoy the cultural, social and economic treasures that have defined our people for a millennium” (2010). While his words relate to the care of our natural environment, they are highlighted for two reasons: (a) our stewardship responsibility as a household is towards the goal of sustaining our region’s ecological wellbeing; and (b) this implies a new way of structuring our political cooperation and relations at the local, national and regional levels so that this responsibility can be nurtured. Rev. Boseto’s words are unmistakably a warning for us in light of global trends set in motion centuries ago with the secularisation process, but it is only now that we are seeing their impacts on our people, and this is now being laid bare by the impact of the coronavirus.

Our ecological future will need to include how we understand and define ecology. Another of our ecumenical elders, the Samoan Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, described the concept of the ‘household’ poignantly: “I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a *tofi* (inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging” (2007).

Development, politics and theology in our story of the New Normal will depend on how well we understand ecology as the fundamental framework of our region as ‘God’s household’. And it will depend on how we are prepared to draw from and base our policies – church, development, political, environment and economics – on the values and wisdom of our traditions, cultures and spiritualities. We will need to factor into the measures of our national and regional progress our ecological assets, which include the losses and damages to our

environment, aspects of our cultures and traditions, and our relationships. And conversely, we must factor in the benefits of emerging ecological relationships with our environment, ocean and political relations. In addition, we will need to develop, both at the regional and national levels, our collective and specific indicators of development.

### **Politics**

Our people are as ancient as our islands, with distinct cultures, traditions and worldviews. Yet as indigenous people, we all struggle to express who we are and our perspectives on what life expects from us. For many years, from the arrival of the missionaries and traders to today, we have been domesticated by the idea that there is only one story for all of us – the good life as prescribed by the head offices in New York, London and Beijing, or, closer to home, in Sydney, Canberra and Wellington. But there is a new emerging political story by our young people, which is that ‘we need a new story but one that is premised on who we are, our cultures, traditions and faith’ (see Ernst & Johnson, eds. 2017). We need such a premise to anchor our story in the New Normal. We must give ourselves permission to state our views on the question ‘*who are we as Pacific people in this story?*’

We must work together to create common political goals with indicators to measure the health of our political life. We need to break the habit of only listening to like-minded people, or people from the same sub-region – Polynesia, Micronesia or Melanesia. This means that we must learn to talk across the artificial political boundaries of colonial division, and to share our beliefs, our relational mandates, and our traditional links that trace us back to thousands of years of existence in the Pacific. The differences in our political views, stances on issues, debates about identity and our political future are not tragic. But unless we participate with deep passion and commitment to writing this aspect of our story for the New Normal, it will be impossible to imagine a world of exciting possibilities for our political life together in our Pacific household. We must be proud of our respective histories to script this aspect of our story for the New Normal – a story about who we are and about our islands, and about what we believe our politics and their indicators ought to be for us in our national and regional households. Our entire uncensored histories must be a part of our identities in our unfolding story of the New Normal. Political education on these things is all the more important because in order to educate our people, we must restore into our consciousness the pivotal role of our respective cultures and literature, and the life-giving values of our respective faiths, cultures and political traditions.

***“Development, politics and theology in our story of the New Normal will depend on how well we understand ecology as the fundamental framework of our region as ‘God’s household.’ ”***

Our people must be confident of who they are, where they stand, and on whose behalf. These must serve as the foundation for our people’s personal and collective identity, the source of their uniqueness, and their basis for understanding who they are in their engagement with the design of the New Normal story. A great deal depends on the content of our political education at our higher learning institutions, at the local and regional levels, and who and how our political histories should be taught. Supporting this endeavour is one of the most important steps on the path toward a strong, flourishing political journey in our region. Most often we ask our children, ‘what do you expect from life?’, which is the wrong question to ask. The question ought to be, ‘what does life expect from you?’ This latter places the onus on us to make life more just, compassionate and caring. To ask the opposite is to be passive regarding what life gives us – injustices, greed and violence. We must also ask, ‘what does our political life expect from us?’ rather than ‘what do we expect from politics?’ This is another reason we need to write this aspect of the New Normal story.

### **Development**

Today our regional and local identity as members of God’s household in the Pacific is experiencing not only objective pressures stemming from the increasing consumption, commercialisation and secularisation in our societies – which is part and parcel of the globalisation process – but also the consequences of non-attendance to the need to renew, reframe and script our regional and local stories of what development and its journey ought to be for us in the Pacific. The result has been the decline in self-belief concerning who we are as uniquely people of the Pacific, and hence a decline in development cooperation and relationships. We are faced with the demoralisation of our region and our respective societies, with a deficit of trust in our political systems, in our political and church leadership, and in our accountability and our people’s responsibility towards each other.

Our diversity is our strength. Each island country has strengths of beliefs, philosophies, moral resources, and a distinctive cultural and Christian

foundation. The main thing that will determine or indicate that this aspect of our story – development – is successful is our people’s quality of life, the depth of their faith experiences, and the quality of our distinctive Pacific island societies and their intellectual, spiritual and moral strength. Development is not just about the material wellbeing of our people. After all, economic growth, prosperity and geopolitical influence in our islands are derived from societal conditions. But this aspect of our story will depend on: (a) our decisive action to believe that it is possible to conceive of another way of measuring our development and progress; and (b) our leaders – church, political and traditional – being united by common developmental goals and obligations to each other. In this sense, the question of finding and strengthening a Pacific ecological development framework, as indicated above, is fundamental.

It is evident that it is impossible to move forward without scripting this aspect of the story of the New Normal as we see it, anchoring it in our philosophies, cultures and faith traditions, and the wisdom therein. Unless we do this, development and its measures will continue to favour the few and disadvantage the many among us, and the ‘normal’ that was will be the story of the New Normal. We as leaders – church, political and traditional – must script this aspect of our story together; it cannot be otherwise. This is our task, not someone else’s. Our mission resources ought to focus on reframing today’s dominant single story of the ‘good life,’ which says that our sole purpose in life is economic productivity and consumption, and that personal convenience is the end goal of human development. We must write a story of a development as a story of health and wellbeing.

***“As churches, we need to align ourselves more and more with the decisive biblical view about who we are: created in the image of God, and because of this, possessing the power to choose, act and take responsibility for our destiny (Genesis 2–3) ... We must reclaim the belief that the source of action and responsibility lies within ourselves. ”***

As churches, we need to align ourselves more and more with the decisive biblical view about who we are: created in the image of God, and because of this, possessing the power to choose, act and take responsibility for our destiny (Genesis 2–3). That is what is so revolutionary and extraordinary about the Genesis narrative and the Exodus experience. We must reclaim the belief that the source of action and responsibility lies within ourselves. The prophets and

Jesus our Lord were amongst the first to think globally, to conceive of a God transcending place and national boundaries, and to think of humanity as a single moral community linked by a covenant of mutual responsibility. They conceived of society as a place where ‘justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a never-ending stream’ (Micah 6:6–8), and of a future in which war had been abolished and peoples live together in peace (Micah 4:1–5). These insights and aspirations have lost none of their power today. This, then, should be the basis of our renewed thirst to craft our story for the New Normal.

As leaders of our churches and with our people, we have lived through some of the most turbulent, dramatic and life-changing periods in our region, some of which are still with us today, such as the effects of climate change and natural disasters, and now the coronavirus pandemic. But amidst all of these, we are discovering a new way of seeing our world and the realities of our people. We are returning to ourselves, to our own histories, just as we did at other points in the political developments of our island countries.

We will together carve a future that will be written in graciousness because we will script something about which we care and love – our Pacific household. We have now the gift of the written word which, as the late Bernard Narokobi said, we can utilise to “...reflect on our ancient past and the modern life. We can have a responsibility to ourselves and to the world to bring to the world the treasures of our civilization” (cited in Zorn 2010).

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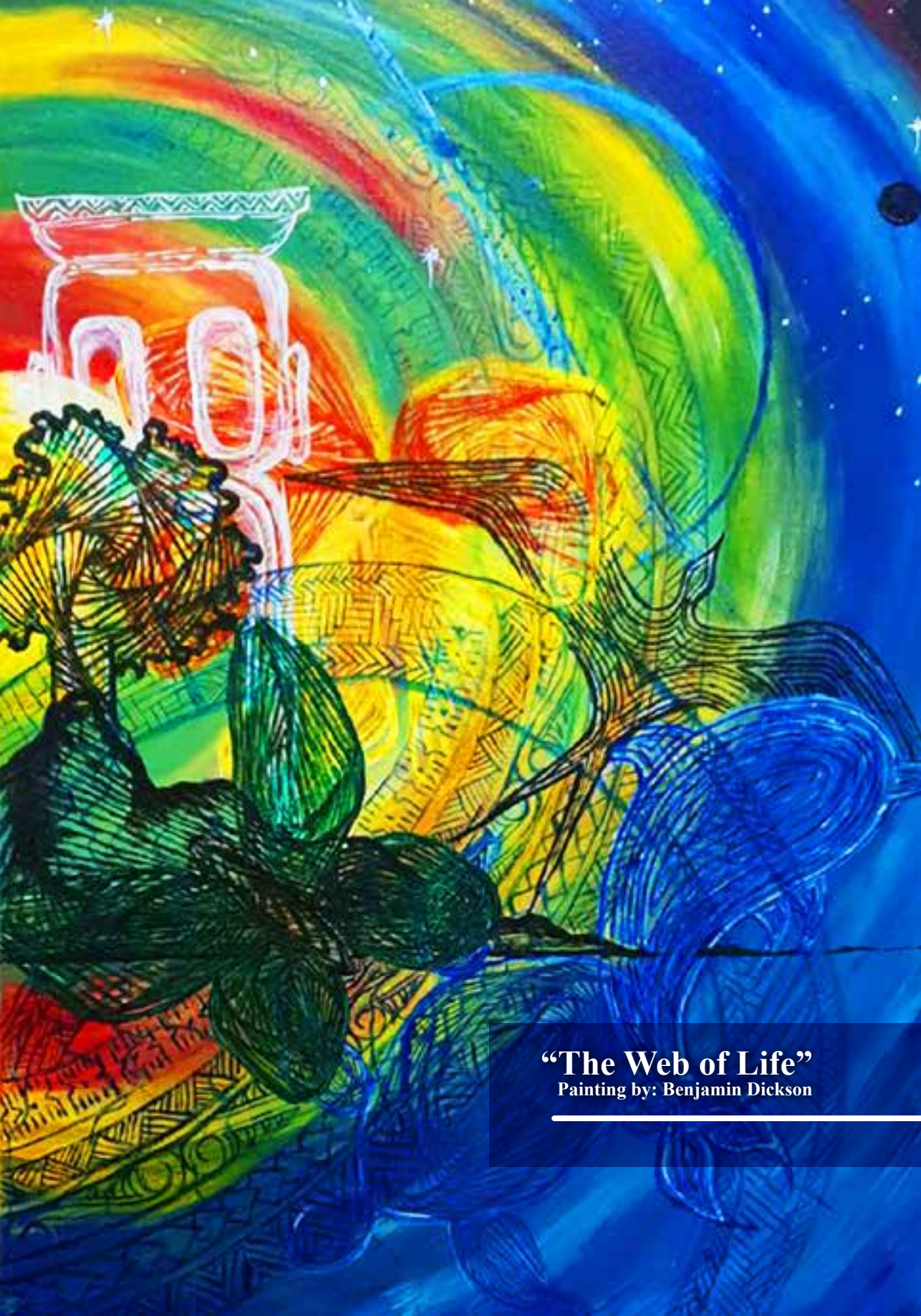
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Rev. Dr. Tevita Havea is currently the Moderator of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), and Convener of the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting (PCLM), comprising the leaders of the 32 mainline churches and their congregations from across the Pacific region, including West Papua, and representing about 8.2 million people, 92% of the total population of the Pacific island states, excluding Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand.



**“The Web of Life”**

Painting by: Benjamin Dickson

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# **A Radical Consciousness is Essential**

*Roshika Deo*



We cannot look back; we must move forward. We must resist going back to an unequal and unjust world that was not functioning for most of us. We need a world where respect for the rule of law and human rights is paramount, and an economic model that reflects this.

The capitalist, neoliberal and patriarchal global and local economic system has continued to fail us. It is an economic system that is exploitative, racist, misogynist, violent, greedy, and inherently biased. We need economies and interventions that recognise and include unpaid care and domestic work as productive activities. Our tomorrow must transform women's reproductive labour, which is rooted in gender inequality. Our tomorrow needs a gender-responsive public service, a gender-transformative social protection, corporate accountability, localised innovative agricultural programmes, and gender budgeting. So, what do we need to do?

First, we need urgently to demilitarise. The culture of militarisation is deeply entrenched in our societies and it continues to erode peace, care, security and humanity. We do not need military forces, weapons and wars, but human security through health care, social welfare and protection, food security, human rights, social cohesion and education. Our tomorrow must be demilitarised through reductions in spending for the military and police. We need to stop militarising our young people in schools. We need to stop giving the police unfettered

powers to use the criminal justice system to address public health issues. We need to stop criminalising inequalities and stop the violence by security forces. Our tomorrow must be demilitarised to create a free-thinking active citizenry where our wellbeing and dignity are prioritised.

We need to fund violence prevention programs, especially prevention strategies to end violence against women, children and the LGBTQI community. We already know what needs to be done to dismantle patriarchy and a heteronormative culture, but we do not have adequate political backing. We took swift and urgent action to allocate resources for COVID-19, but we have failed to show the same urgency and care for the lives of girls and women experiencing violence.

We also get bogged down in bureaucracy, relying on expensive expatriates, petty politics, donor appeasements and territorialism, sidelining the local practitioners who have greater influence, knowledge and leverage for sustainability, ownership and impact.

This brings me to mental health. There is no health without mental health, and yet mental health remains one of the most marginalised aspects of our reality. It is evident in the high rates of attempted and completed suicides. It is evident in the high rates of violence, bullying and abuse of animals. Children remain unsupported. Adults continue to struggle with childhood trauma. Women live with emotional and mental abuse. Existing conditions, some diagnosed and some undiagnosed, have been exacerbated by social realities. The list of mental health challenges is endless; however, the support and care are scarce or non-existent. Intergenerational trauma is

ignored despite this conversation being tied to the tension, insecurity and lack of social cohesion in Fiji. We need a comprehensive, well-funded intervention aimed at preventing suicides and addressing intergenerational trauma, with substantial investments in mental health and wellbeing.

***“The capitalist, neoliberal and patriarchal global and local economic system has continued to fail us. It is an economic system that is exploitative, racist, misogynist, violent, greedy, and inherently biased. We need economies and interventions that recognise and include unpaid care and domestic work as productive activities.”***

Lastly, we need knowledge sharing across cultures and people. In the vast majority of our cultures, the earth, the wind, the sky, the rain, the land and the animals are considered spiritual and godly in various ways. Many important decisions and changes in our lives are made by acknowledging these elements of nature, either through a prayer, a custom or embracing our spirituality. Over time this knowledge and care has deteriorated. Some have lost it in the pain of traversing the Giriti history and yearning to belong and be accepted.

We are not separate from the planet but part of it. We are not separate from each other but part of each other. We need to share and collaborate on traditional knowledge to build communities and social cohesion.

**We are a revolution waiting to happen...**

***About the Author***

Roshika Deo is a Pacific Islander of Giritiya descent from the Fiji Islands. She has over 12 years of professional experience in social development, gender equality, human rights and the rule of law. She teaches part-time at the regional university and works as a consultant for various agencies and governments. She is the youngest Pacific recipient to date of the US Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award, from Michelle Obama in 2014.

## He moemoea mo oku mokopuna . . .

*Jenny Te Paa Daniel*



*E oku rangatira, tena tatou katoa. I tenei wa o te ao hurihuri, anei etahi o nga whakaaro aroha mo ngai taua te iwi o nga moutere o te Moana Nui a Kiwa. E tika ana nga korero o nga tipuna, no mai ra ano na te Atua e noho marika kei waenganui i a matou.*

I have always believed it to be so that since time on earth began, God has been with the peoples of the Pacific. We have therefore been forever blessed with an environment and a way of life perfectly attuned to the needs and ongoing stewardship of all in God's very good creation. Over time, however, we have not been as careful as we ought. We have not been faithful stewards of God's gifts so freely given. Knowing as we do that through God's grace we are blessed time and time again by the extant offer of God's selfless redemptive love, what are we now to do to heal and to restore our portion of God's creation and ourselves as God's Pacific peoples, especially in the current circumstance?

As I write these words I have my *mokopuna* firmly in my mind. I have my fierce maternal yearnings for their futures deeply etched in my heart. In late March 2020 our beautiful whanau matriarch, my beloved mother Zita, took wings and journeyed onward to be with the ancestors, to be at rest eternal with God. The mantle of whanau leadership now falls to me, and so it is that I wonder with deep urgency just how best I ought to continue her work. Her labours of love were only ever singularly focused on how to ensure the best possible future for those most precious in all our Pacific families – our *mokopuna*. What follows

then are glimpses into the conversations we regularly had about our concerns and our delights about the future of the Pacific, and in particular the rightful place and the rightful prospects for our peoples. Our *korero* was always feisty, funny and unavoidably political.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed so much about the essential character of each one of our Pacific Island communities. Respective governments at first reacted tentatively and then subsequently responded more seriously and comprehensively to the completely unanticipated and largely little understood ‘enemy’ that first appeared on the South Pacific horizon in early 2020.

Ours is a region which over the past few decades has uncritically allowed itself to be utterly seduced by the spurious economic lure of international tourists, who come in droves to satiate their perversely ill-informed tropical island fantasies. They come and are feted by our ever generous Pacific hospitality. Most leave behind little of enduring economic value and almost nothing of spiritual, environmental, cultural or political value. It is as though a creeping politics of individualised greed has subsumed our time-bound cultural tradition of *tatou tatou*. Our troubling preoccupation and thus dangerous dependency upon international tourism is in part what rendered us all so ill prepared, so potentially vulnerable to COVID-19. Thanks be to God that, in this instance, our pristine island communities have managed to keep the coronavirus at bay.

It might have been so different but for the vigilance and selflessness of those within local island communities, those who have seared into their memories the stories of the elders, who spoke of the horrors inflicted in earlier times by ships carrying sailors and passengers infected with death-dealing diseases against which the peoples of the Pacific had no immunity, no ability to withstand – leprosy, influenza, typhoid, measles. It has therefore been largely the pre-emptive protective action taken in many instances not by political leaders but by traditional and other community leaders which has spared the Pacific unimaginable horror. It is timely, indeed obligatory, to reflect now on just how blessed we have been to avoid the impending waves of death which were almost within the reefs surrounding our islands – the unconscionable loss of life which the coronavirus would have wrought with such ease had it been allowed to enter onto the shores of our unsuspecting and utterly vulnerable island communities. It is timely therefore more than ever to reflect on the political leadership crisis this experience has also drawn into even sharper relief. For it is here in the political realm that the essential work of rebuilding and future proofing the future for the children of the Pacific must now begin. It is here within the primary building

block portfolios upon which the future wellbeing and prosperity of the entire community depend. It is within each of these portfolios where I believe radical change is now clearly indicated if our *mokopuna* are to stand any chance of flourishing.

### **Health**

Ironically, one of the freely admitted political responses to the pandemic threat has been the fear of our respective island health systems being unable to cope, under-resourced, ill-equipped, unsophisticated. It is true that, in many Pacific Island nations, health systems are rudimentary, parlous, overly dependent upon the tightly controlled largesse of the colonialist benefactor nations Australia and New Zealand, international donors, the WHO, and increasingly upon the little understood insidious benevolence of the sleeping dragon. But it must not be that way going into the future. It is going to take compassionate, visionary, morally trustworthy, experienced men, women and young people, as well as similarly gifted medical and scientific leaders to re-imagine and to reconstruct future wellbeing pathways. There are many skilled, qualified, generous-hearted Pacific Island experts capable of undertaking this work, but what is needed is an end to the corrupt politics which so often precludes the finest and the best being entrusted the privilege of leading the way.

### **Education**

Similarly, across the Pacific education is also accorded very uneven political attention. It is thus generally under-developed, under-resourced, under-equipped and clearly under-valued. In spite of many heroic individual efforts among teachers, principals and community leaders, there is little evidence of effective national level cohesion, collaboration or contextualisation among and between education providers. In higher education the default continues to be toward either New Zealand or Australia. But it does not need to be that way, and certainly it ought not continue to be that way going into the future, especially when much of the curriculum necessary for inculcating the moral values, cultural traditions and theoretical expertise needed for the nurturing of good citizens and good leaders already resides, to the largest extent, within Pacific communities themselves. But it is going to take compassionate, visionary, morally trustworthy, experienced men, women and young people, as well as similarly gifted leading educators, to re-imagine and to reconstruct future educational pathways. There are many skilled, qualified, generous-hearted Pacific Island experts capable of undertaking this work of transforming education, but what is needed is an end to the corrupt politics which so often precludes the finest and the best being entrusted the privilege of leading the way.

## Trade

Trade within the Pacific and beyond is arguably one of the most incoherent, un-economical, unimaginative, exploitative and utterly under-realised aspects of Pacific life. Our region is blessed with incalculably valuable marine and land resources and yet, to the largest extent, we are failing to protect the very environments which gift those resources as tradeable products into our care. Further, we are failing to maximise the true value of Pacific products. We have for too long prioritised the coveted lure of global trading partners in preference to those closest to us in the Oceanic neighbourhood. We have failed to see beyond the distant and now disappearing horizons of economic greed. Trade throughout the Pacific does not and ought no longer to be the way it has been. What is needed are compassionate, visionary, morally trustworthy, experienced men, women and young people, as well as similarly gifted ethically grounded business leaders and economists, to re-imagine and to reconstruct future mutually beneficial and environmentally sustainable trading pathways. There are many skilled, qualified, generous-hearted Pacific Island experts capable of undertaking this work, but what is needed is an end to the corrupt politics which so often precludes the finest and the best being entrusted the privilege of leading the way.

## Tourism

Apprehending the devastating economic impact arising from the loss of international tourism ought not lead to any reconsideration of how to simply return to the way things were. Rather, it ought to be seen as providing the greatest opportunity for reimagining how best to repurpose existing infrastructure in new ways, ways that give priority to uplifting and upholding the *mana me te wairua o nga moutere, me nga moana e hora nei, me nga tangata Pasefika katoa!* All it takes are compassionate, visionary, morally trustworthy, experienced men, women and young people working alongside similarly gifted experienced tourism leaders, all of whom are capable of reimagining and realigning new forms of sustainable and eco-friendly tourism that repositions local communities and not foreign interests as *kaitiaki*. This would be tourism that protects the local and thus honours the spirit of the national. It will require political will, moral courage and determinedly Pacific oriented hearts and minds to reorient tourism as the precious taonga it surely is.

## Church Leadership

Church leaders across the Pacific have been largely silent in the public square during the pandemic period, apart from offering unhelpful and uninspiring theologically bereft platitudes either to do with God's judgment or punishment

in the current circumstance, or with the equally unintelligent promise of God's divine protection no matter what. Instead of seizing upon the Gospel imperative to cry out about the inequities and structural injustices which lie at the heart of our insufficiencies in health care, education, trade and economic affairs, too many Pacific church leaders prefer to remain as unassailable elites, claiming first and foremost their humanly constructed privileges rather than the God-given responsibilities of church leadership.

Pacific churches must not remain as they are – God requires of all and not just some church leaders that they be compassionate, visionary, morally trustworthy, experienced men, women and young people working selflessly and tirelessly for those who are the least, the lost and the lonely, that they consistently inspire confidence, courage and hope, that they enable and empower all in our communities to succeed and to flourish, that they stand for justice, for inclusivity, for equality and human rights, indeed for kindness to characterise relationships among and between all God's people. These are currently so few among the church leaders we have. And yet there are many wonderful faith-filled young Pacific Island men, women and young people who ought to be encouraged and prepared for the sacred work of church leadership. But what is needed is an end to the conservative patriarchal dominance which so firmly precludes the finest and the best being entrusted with the privilege of leading the way.

***“God requires of all and not just some church leaders that they be compassionate, visionary, morally trustworthy, experienced men, women and young people working selflessly and tirelessly for those who are the least, the lost and the lonely...”*** ”

### **Political leadership**

Uniquely Pacific political leadership, albeit proceeding from a secular basis, ought nonetheless to be on the exact same Gospel-based trajectory and to be diversely representative. For surely it is only when the Pacific-wide kingdom of God, comprising men, women and young people, are together entrusted with the awesome responsibility of political leadership that it is more likely to be infused with the necessary compassion, essential accountabilities, visionary thinking and moral trustworthiness, and more likely to be conducted with the necessary integrity and dignity. There are many skilled, qualified, passionate, generous-hearted Pacific Island people capable of being entrusted the work of

political leadership, but what is needed is an end to the shamelessly corrupt tribalised politics which always precludes the finest and the best even offering themselves, let alone being chosen.

### **Conclusion**

As COVID-19 has changed our lives now so irrevocably, we are confronted with stark choices – to scramble fruitlessly to return to the old uncritically romanticised Pacific ‘normal’ with all its inequalities, injustices, political corruption, economic greed, poverty, its nil regard for the rights of women or young people; or to raise ourselves above the extant challenges now before us. We can because we must, with urgency, courage, hope and an abundance of *aroha*, turn to consider the God-given opportunities now before us. We can and we must critically reflect on the lives we have been living, to be honest in confronting those aspects which are not in accord with Gospel teachings. We can and we must, as God’s precious Pacific people, question if indeed all in our communities are able to live lives free from abuse, violence and poverty, where all can truly belong, succeed and flourish. We must ask if kindness and integrity characterise our relationships with our environment and with one another. We must ask if our leaders and our leadership systems are just, and therefore truly reflective of the diversity of our communities. And if not, we must ask ‘why not?’

It is my fervent belief that as peoples of the Pacific, we can do so much better as we turn now to face the future with extraordinarily clean hands and with far more open hearts! Even as we struggle to comprehend the rapidity of change and, understandably, to somewhat resist the overwhelming prospect of so much that is yet unknown, we must also remind ourselves that as God’s Pacific peoples we have a duty of care to the pristine environment we are blessed to call home. Equally, we must never forget that we are bound by that same duty of care for each other as sisters and brothers in Christ, *o Te Moana Nui o Kiwa*. It is because of our faith commitment that we are being called anew, individually and collectively, to reflect with even greater urgency on the brokenness and vulnerability of many within our communities and of the environment itself. We are being called in this moment to commit, with renewed vigour, to address all of those injustices which give rise to human suffering, and to work tirelessly towards a more just, more equitable and more inclusive future – one that uplifts the God-given dignity of all our people, of all our men, our women and our young people, and more especially, our precious *mokopuna*. *No reira ka nui tenei mo tenei wa. Nga manaakitanga a te Runga Rawa ki a tatou katoa!*

***About the Author***

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# Imagining a New International Economic Order for the Pacific Islands

*Transform Aqorau*



A new international economic order must be embraced for the Pacific Islands which places our peoples and cultural heritage at the core of this new development paradigm. There are those who imagine the proposed bubble with Australia and New Zealand as involving mainly the opening up of our borders to enable tourists from those two countries to visit the islands, but if there is anything that we have learned from the economic impact of COVID-19, it is that we cannot and should not rebuild our economies by going back to the same models that we have been using before the pandemic. It is logical, therefore, that we must now rethink our development strategies, and look to each other to help ourselves. In this regard, how can we package a new international economic order for the region that embraces our peoples and cultures as the core of a new development approach? The idea of a people-centred approach to development is not new, but what might be novel is the idea of integrating our economies to create a single customs and development union, within which we all apply the same high standards related to the extraction of our natural resources, so as to ensure that our peoples are the major beneficiaries of the benefits that flow from their natural resources.

## **A Pacific Islands Bubble in which we belong to a single economic and development union**

When the Solomon Islands Government declared a state of emergency in March, the Prime Minister encouraged those who did not have any reason to be in Honiara to return to their villages. A lot of people went back to their

home islands and villages, signifying for us that we in the Pacific Islands have the option of going back to the village, that we can turn to the land and sea to sustain ourselves, that our God-given natural and cultural resources are what will sustain us. Indeed, even in Honiara people extended the cultivation of food gardens to whatever spare land on the hills and slopes they could find on the outskirts of the town boundary. This is the second major crisis that Solomon Islands has faced since independence which is having a major economic impact. On both occasions, people have gone back to their villages and their land to sustain themselves.

I would like to imagine that in a new international order for the region we develop our own economic bubble, wherein we become a single customs, trade and development block in which we see ourselves more as peoples of this single union, working to help and support each other, rather than being compartmentalised by our nation states. We have spoken of the region as an oceanic state, or the aquatic continent, yet we are not free to work and live in our respective countries. Some of us still require visas to be stamped on arrival, and at the most are only given 30-day visitors' visas. We have spoken a lot about having a greater level of integration, but it is easier said at regional meetings than practiced. Looking ahead, however, I imagine a Pacific Islands bubble in which there is greater labour mobility amongst our peoples and even greater flexibility to do business in our respective countries by our own people in the bubble. We need each other more than ever, but more importantly we need to share our resources and ideas with each other so that we help to support and uplift our regional economy.

The current features of regional cooperation would have to be transformed in this new international economic paradigm through the establishment of a Pacific Islands Parliament, which would be a regulatory authority for customs, trade, investments and the setting of common environmental standards for the extractive industries involving our terrestrial and oceanic resources. This does not mean that our countries would be giving up on their sovereignty, as they would still be free to choose who they do business with, but it is to ensure that the interests of our peoples are safeguarded.

### **A new paradigm for our extractive industries**

I can also imagine a new paradigm for our extractive industries, especially our fisheries and forestry resources, whereby we pursue a development model that promotes cross-border investments in fisheries, where we control the supply chain for the global tuna industry. COVID-19 has revealed some

***“We need each other more than ever, but more importantly we need to share our ideas and resources with each other, so that we help to support and uplift our regional economy. ”***

Soltuna Processing Company in Solomon Islands, are not as badly impacted. This reveals the major defect in the current model for the development of our tuna resources, which is simply relying on licensing fees. There have had to be trade-offs between giving these foreign operators greater operational flexibility by not applying some of the mandatory requirements which have been put in place to ensure that our peoples’ tuna resources are not stolen.

In a new international economic order for our tuna industry, I can imagine the Pacific Islands within the economic union to be the primary producers of canned tuna. This can be done through the promotion of cross-border investments with each other, which will see canned tuna from tuna caught in Nauru, Kiribati or Tuvalu processed in canneries in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji, and sold at Coles, Woolworth’s and Aldi supermarkets in Australia and New Zealand. Solomon Islands produces some of the tastiest and most popular canned tuna in the region, but you will be lucky to find it in any of the supermarkets in Australia and New Zealand. I imagine in this new economic order that we find in ourselves the will and courage to change the business model of fishing, so that we help develop our tuna resources in our economic bubble.

The legacy of large-scale commercial forestry extraction, especially in Melanesia, is even more sobering and should be transformed so that the business model is one that entails

shortcomings with the current supply chain for our extractive industries, especially tuna and round logs. The over-reliance on foreign fishing has exposed some of the shortcomings in the current business model, where most of the raw material is taken to Thailand and Ecuador. The fishing businesses that were mostly affected were those that rely on transshipment of their catch to overseas ports, while those which are vertically integrated and rely less on foreign crews, such as the National Fisheries Development (NFD) Ltd and

***“An important political statement that I envision... is that we cannot look to anyone else to help us to save ourselves. We have to look at what we have, at what God has given us to provide for ourselves. ”***

the resource owners harvesting their resources themselves. I imagine a new international economic order whereby builders and furniture businesses in Australia and New Zealand agree to purchase their hardwood from within the economic bubble. A new business model could be developed which would require the logging industry to work to a higher standard of environmental safeguards, promote logging to meet the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification, and also ensure that a tree is replanted for every tree that is removed from the forest.

I also imagine a new international economic order that takes into account the cultural, biodiversity and ecosystem values of the oceans and forests and factors these into the extractive costs of tuna and round logs. In order to do this, the national accounting system in the economic bubble would also have to be reconsidered so that it not only measures the contribution of the extractive industries to the gross domestic product (GDP), but also takes into account the value of the loss to biodiversity and the ecosystem.

### **Transforming into a Digital Economy for Our Rural Farmers**

I imagine that in this new international economic order, the role of digital technology will become more pronounced as we develop our connectivity to each other, to the markets, and also to the outside world. In this regard, we will have to look at innovative ways in which produce from our rural farmers can be valued-added and reach the markets. We also have to provide a platform for online trading for our artists and singers to share their skills with each other and with the outside world. Our new international economic order should allow us to become closer to each other, so that we can help to build our economic bubble.

### **Conclusion**

The challenge going forward will be how to grow our economy in the face of all the constraints to the supply chain and trade with our traditional partners. An important political statement that I envision in this new international economic order is that we cannot look to anyone else to help us to save ourselves. We have to look at what we have, at what God has given us to provide for ourselves. As we have been able to demonstrate in Solomon Islands, not once but twice now, it is our rural people who have helped sustain our economy when we found ourselves in economic strife. We can only look once again to ourselves and our own resources to help create a new international economic order for our peoples. This is what I imagine for our economic bubble.

***About the Author***

Dr. Transform Aqorau is CEO of iTUNA Intel, Founding Director of Pacific Catalysts and OSA International Global, a not-for-profit social accountability for crewing standards on fishing vessels. He was former Legal Adviser to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Legal Counsel and Deputy Director-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, and Pioneer CEO of the parties to the Nauru Agreement Office (PNAO).

# Keeping Scales Sensible and Sustainable: The Need for a Deeper Spirituality

*Unaisi Nabobo-Baba*



“I have a vision of the Pacific Islands that has excellent ecological balance.”

Our Planet is one of many in the galaxy. I have a vision where all people in the Pacific and the world are taught respect for the galaxy and for the world we live in. This is how our ancestors lived – sustainably. There is a need for ecological balance and we must enforce ecological justice via education policies at all levels, in our laws and development policies. Wherever we are, we must all work towards this one goal – sustainable ecological balance!

## **Earth is Finite**

As a planet, our earth is finite; its ecological balance determines how everything in it survives and lives. Earth also affects other planets in the galaxy. Human beings need a reminder, an education, a New Normal where everyday discourses focus on the importance of humans remembering they are only one part of life – that the ecology of life **MUST** be respected. The first step in the new educative process is enhancing and reminding us to return to nature. All persons should be encouraged to spend quiet time in nature with God. Spiritual revivals, I envisage, will happen and must happen. A deeper spirituality is needed as it is the life force that the Earth needs. This is a first step! This can be materialised in various ways. The Pacific can strike a good ecological balance. The future will see more respect for God, and our spiritualities will be sharper and more respectful of the environment and its rich heritages. This includes the rich seafaring and

artisan history of over 5,000 years in our islands, and in Papua New Guinea over 50,000 years; our elaborate and very diversified cultural traditions within our indigenous Pacific communities; and the newer settler cultures that have been here for the last one hundred or so years.

**“Human beings need a reminder, an education, a New Normal where everyday discourses focus on the importance of humans remembering they are only one part of life – that the ecology of life *MUST* be respected. ”**

### **Less is more**

It was Ernst Friedrich Schumacher who wrote the book *Small is Beautiful* (1973). His foresight may be a necessary text for schools of the future. There are other Pacific writings and speeches on the same theme that will and must inform education after COVID-19 – an education in balance. Earth needs moments of silences and rest, and this is what COVID-19 has done! Everyone must scale back. The COVID-19 experience saw many buildings and institutions closed, and clearly the enormity of their sizes relative to the size of the country and Fiji’s population is something we must rethink very carefully. *Small is Beautiful!* BUT – small is not what modern neoliberal development paradigms promote. This begs the question: *Can we rethink and redefine a development paradigm that saves earth and humankind, a paradigm that promotes ecological justice?*

### **Education**

In the post COVID-19 New Normal, I would love to see education in the lower levels (grades 1-3) be more about character building; here children would be taught the values of our people, and their curriculum activities and subjects would be focused on service in the community and at home. All students can do basic carpentry, gardening and eating healthy Pacific grown and sourced meals. Community leaders and teachers could be used to check that all students in their communities are doing, learning and contributing to community and family life in a way that is productive. Reading can be made a part of this as well. If this lockdown continues, students can stay home and be meaningfully engaged in community activities. I am wondering whether lessons from the lockdown can inform some of our ways forward. During the coronavirus lockdown, mothers, aunties, sisters and families helped to keep students educated. Should we then

look at other alternatives to schooling and education? We need an ocean and land based curriculum! There must be a strong emphasis on environmental, farming and economic activity. The type of geography and economics we teach should focus on how our natural resources in the Pacific are used for economic sustainability. This can start in early schooling curriculum or the non-formal education programmes run by NGOs in different communities to enhance sustainability and economic livelihoods.

### **Pacific Villages and Settlements**

I am wondering if there are new ways of living whereby each family lives around their land and their water sources. This will allow ease of access to daily gardening, as well as families building homes that are sustainable, with sustainable ideas for gardening, forestry, fishing and other home and family activities. All must try to have sea/river/ocean access. Water tanks and boreholes can be a part of community drives and fundraising events.

### **Women and Development**

Women must increasingly be included, encouraged and propelled towards leadership at all levels. They need to drive development. More women across the Pacific can play a more active role at all levels of decision making. But all of that MUST be towards a Pacific Ecologically Empathic Greening of the Environment. Women MUST push agriculture and plants, and fish their livelihoods. Small business incentives could also come from these activities, with professional guidance. This needs leaders with vision and leaders who earn the respect of people. There could also be a considered push for agro-business, small to intermediate scale, which will enhance income generation for our women. The future has to enhance the majority of our people: artisans, village dwellers, urban and peri-urban dwellers. Every woman must ensure that they are planting trees and food crops weekly. Depending on where we are and land availability, women must push the greening of the environment, and tell Pacific stories and heritage values as they do so. This change has to happen.

### **Demilitarisation**

‘Can we have peace without a military?’ is a question that we must now address. All the wastages and unnecessary or irrelevant work, like that shown by the military institutions, need to be re-examined in terms of their contribution to societal peacefulness and sustainable development. The military can be demilitarised to be used as a task force for rural development – a type of agro-forestry and fisheries corporation. This is my vision of how militaries can be transformed to actually work the land, forest and seas to boost economic

development and be involved in SMEs (small and micro enterprises) for our various tribes and groups in the Pacific.

### **A Digital Pacific**

One obvious truth revealed during the COVID-19 lockdown period has been the enormity of many of the buildings we have built, some now appearing silly and excessive, especially institutions like churches, schools and universities. In the first two months of the pandemic, we were reminded that it is the people and the ecology of life that need our focus. Moving forward, we may need smaller buildings, with information communication technology (ICT) accessibility available for all. Half of the Pacific is in digital ‘darkness.’ There is a big digital divide. This is what the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us. All families must now have, as part of their basic needs, Wi-Fi and a laptop or computer access. What this may mean is that all community *solu* (giving or donating), for example, goes towards fulfilling all the ICT needs of each family. There needs to be a survey of our most rural and underprivileged populations to find out their access to such basic needs in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The question to ask is how to get our philosophies of life, cultures, arts and stories packaged via ICT so that the world can access our age-old values of sustainability and respect for all life, and our spiritualities that honour life and relationships.

### **Conclusion**

All 21st century leaders must lead. The inequity apparent in the Pacific needs addressing, with a vision of how the community can survive in the long term, especially if there is another virus outburst that may be potentially worse than the current COVID-19 pandemic. Will the Pacific Islands be cordoned off from the rest of the world until next year (2021), when the current pandemic is addressed and a cure hopefully found? Will the cure be readily available to all countries? What will the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) do to encourage a regional protectionist policy? What balance will our leaders ensure between economy and health?

*A future with a conscience, where young people can envision a bright future for themselves post-COVID-19, is really what I hope for. Respect for life must be taught and upheld in as many ways as possible, including in our policies and laws.*

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## *About the Author*

Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba has been working in education and development in the Pacific Islands for the past 30 years, mostly in higher education. Formerly she was a tenured Professor in Education at the University of Guam, and before that a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of the South Pacific. She is a prolific author and scholar; her scholarly works include a focus on education and development, teacher education in the postcolonial Pacific, indigenous knowledge and epistemology, women and leadership, rural and remote education, and issues of access, equity and quality in Pacific education. Unaisi is the first indigenous woman professor in a university in Fiji and Melanesia, one of only a few in the free Pacific to date.

# Inspiring ‘Our Islands of Communities’

*Gordon Leua Nanau*



The coronavirus pandemic, better known as COVID-19, which started in Wuhan, China in December 2019, has brought the world to a standstill in a span of several months. The fast-moving lifestyle, profit-driven economies and global integration promoted by rich and powerful nations has proven inept in the face of this unseen enemy. This crisis has demonstrated that humanity can survive without many of the niceties and luxuries of our contemporary global order. In Solomon Islands and other countries, citizens retreated to their local communities, mostly in remote and maritime locales but also in urban formal and informal settlements (*vanua/komu/vera*), as a spontaneous response to the impending global threat. Pacific communities include some of the most isolated, neglected and peripheral thresholds of the capitalist world. In this instance, Pacific island countries (PICs) shut their borders.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us a big lesson in terms of how vulnerable we are to crises such as pandemics and climate change. Despite genuine intentions, international organisations were unable to guarantee people’s safety. Regional organisations became feeble, with minimal action. The machinery of modern nation-states relied on people’s goodwill, submission, respect for authority and humility in the fight against COVID-19. Economic wealth and development activities became secondary considerations.

Governments pulled the brake on the fast lifestyle, while many were forced to go on extended leave or became unemployed. The common advice from state institutions and employers was ‘work from home’ or ‘work online.’ The travel

industry was severely affected as many airlines grounded their planes, ships docked in ports, roads were cordoned off, borders closed, movements restricted, curfews instituted, and entire cities went on lockdown. Many engaged in the modern cash economy were released on half pay, leave without pay, or simply went without jobs – all extremely difficult and unpleasant experiences.

COVID-19 taught us that things could be done differently, particularly with available progressive communication and earth-friendly technologies. The global messages were: ‘slow down,’ ‘stay home,’ ‘isolate yourself’ and, where possible, ‘work from home!’ For more affluent institutions and businesses, the expression ‘the world at one’s fingertips’ became a reality, while those lagging behind were caught off guard. This goes to show that technologies that are environmentally friendly and adaptable are critically useful and lifesaving in times of pandemics and natural disasters. Keeping up with environmentally clean technologies and industries is the future to embrace. Communicating lifesaving messages to citizens regarding the invisible enemy of the coronavirus, correcting misinformation in communities, providing information on livelihood support, and giving critical advice on hygienic practices were all made possible by advancements in modern communication technologies, especially the internet, radio and television.

In the face of COVID-19, *vanua/komu/vera* was seen as the only safe sanctuary for many Pacific Islanders. Without hesitation, Pacific peoples moved to the safe embrace of their mostly rural and remote villages, to customary land and marine tenure, to their local livelihood chores and close-knit social relationships. For a majority of Pacific Islanders, subsistence living, human compassion and reciprocal relationships became the only sure defence against an invisible enemy. Being remote, maritime and isolated from major urban markets and bright lights was, after all, a good thing!

Indeed, ten out of nineteen coronavirus-free countries globally are in Oceania. Pacific Islanders look for *vanuadira/komudira/veradira*. Limited support from modern social safety nets, mainly through personal savings with national superannuation institutions, was accessed. These funds were used mostly to ensure families could return to their communities to restart their lives in a subsistence economy and await the uncertain future of the modern economy. Pacific Islanders also demonstrated the true human spirit in this time of crises. Some landlords, for instance, allowed their tenants to reside on their properties rent-free for a period of time, until they were certain about the future or until they were able to return and resettle in their home villages. Human relationships

were proven to be more important than monetary profit. This crisis prompts an important question: *What can Pacific islanders do to face the future? What could be a credible Pacific vision?* Certain realities have hit home:

- First, legitimate, participatory and collaborative leadership founded on a culture of respect, translucency and peaceful coexistence must be rejuvenated.
- Second, we must strive to empower and connect local communities and villages, including schools, clinics and hospitals, with environmentally friendly technologies. Advancements must not be at the expense of close-knit social relationships and the natural environment.
- Third, cleanliness and clean-living habits must be encouraged and facilitated. Local communities must be empowered with proper water supply and sanitation systems to encourage better hygiene.
- Finally, we must realise and appreciate the fact that local villages and communities remain Pacific peoples' refuge during times of strife and destitution. Safety, livelihoods, education and processes of human development must be rooted in local communities and ways of knowing. Local communities and what they offer must now be our focus as we face the future.

The Pacific cannot be described in any other way than as an 'Ocean connecting all our islands of communities.' This is the Pacific Manifesto! This should be our vision for the future of Oceania – reinvigorating our islands of communities.

***“We are a region glued together by respect, sincerity and appreciation of diversity. We must support a region comprised of distinct villages, languages, ethnic groups, religious beliefs, islands, provinces, states, nations, confederacies and sub-regions into a strong common ecosystem called Oceania. ”***

We are a region glued together by respect, sincerity and appreciation of diversity. We must support a region comprised of distinct villages, languages, ethnic groups, religious beliefs, islands, provinces, states, nations, confederacies and sub-regions into a strong common ecosystem called Oceania. We must respect and defend the rights of distinct communities across the Pacific and allow each of them the right to develop and enjoy the proceeds of their labour. This diversity must be rooted in local livelihood approaches and ways

of doing things, fertilised and supported by modern ideas, clean technology, determined leadership and positive habits, with humanity and relationships at the core.

Our relationships with each other in our respective communities, and our guaranteed livelihoods bestowed by our customary land and marine tenures, must be upheld with dignity and respect and protected for our children's children. As part of our vision for Oceania, we must strive to keep the environment clean through eco-friendly models of development and forms of communication. We must put communities first as the core building block of daily human interactions and livelihoods. We must get village community services right so that they genuinely provide safe sanctuaries in future global pandemics and other calamities.

The Bible states that 'the stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' Our village communities have long been neglected and ignored by states across the region. Village communities have proven resilient in the face of COVID-19 and other human-made and natural disasters in the past. We must get our village communities right by empowering them with appropriate livelihood facilities and services, giving them opportunities to generate income and assisting them to access services provided by other entities, including state, sub-regional and regional organisations. We must ensure that communities and families are robust, safe, self-sufficient, vibrant and well connected. If we continue to ignore communities, *wantok* groups and what they represent, the whole Pacific region will lose its particular identity and diversity.

***“We must assent to a shared vision of Oceania where communities are inspired, ecosystem services upheld, and individuals and their families exhilarated as we journey into the future.”***

#### ***About the Author***

Dr. Gordon Leua Nanau is from the Tathimboko region of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. He has a strong interest in leadership issues in Pacific island countries and is a keen observer of the impacts of globalisation on local Pacific communities. His other research interests include constitutional reforms, elections and democracy, rural livelihoods and Pacific epistemologies. He is currently a senior lecturer in the School of Government, Development and International Affairs (SGDIA) at the University of the South Pacific, Laucala campus, in Fiji.

# Back to the Future: Reappropriating Island Time and a Return to Kairos

*James Bhagwan*



*There is an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:*

*A right time for birth and another for death,  
A right time to plant and another to reap,  
A right time to kill and another to heal,  
A right time to destroy and another to construct,  
A right time to cry and another to laugh,  
A right time to lament and another to cheer,  
A right time to make love and another to abstain,  
A right time to embrace and another to part,  
A right time to search and another to count your losses,  
A right time to hold on and another to let go,  
A right time to rip out and another to mend,  
A right time to shut up and another to speak up,  
A right time to love and another to hate,  
A right time to wage war and another to make peace.*

*But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does? I've had a good look at what God has given us to do – busy work, mostly. True, God made everything beautiful in itself and in its time – but he's left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he's coming or going. I've decided that there's nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That's it – eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It's God's gift (Ecclesiastes 3:1-13, *The Message*).*

The novel coronavirus pandemic-enforced lockdowns resulted also in a slowdown of economies and lifestyles. To what extent has that slowdown been a good thing? In the rush by many governments, corporations and communities to get the world going “up to speed,” we are in danger of returning to the frenetic pace of extraction, production and consumption, which is leading the planet towards death.

Expressions such as ‘island time’ and ‘Bula time’ are often used to promote tourism in the idyllic Pacific islands, where ‘time stands still’ and visitors can relax and enjoy a break from the ‘rat race.’ At the same time, these terms are used in a derogatory fashion when things in so-called developing countries in the Pacific and elsewhere are moving too slowly for development agencies and expatriates. The idyllic timelessness romantically associated with the Pacific is then presaged as *mokusiga* (“wasting the day” in *iTaukei*) – lethargy and apathy towards actions that may need to be taken.

Yet in the timelessness of the lockdowns, there has been a timely reprioritising of values: more family time, albeit enforced; a return to indigenous traditional practices of food security for those who have lost employment or income; the reintroduction of barter systems in some communities (see Barter for Better Fiji 2020).

In terms of spirituality, as reflected in a Pacific Conference of Churches pastoral letter (PCC 2020), we have been innovative in our use of appropriate technology, and by promoting home worship we have strengthened family spirituality. New ways of working, connecting and interacting are being used. We have begun to realise what we can do without and what is important to us. Individualism and materialism are waning as relationality and positive traditional values and spirituality are increasing.

This is, at the same time, juxtaposed with the practice of patience and timeliness, the *kairos* of ancient Greek, to mean “the right time” (Religion Dictionary 2020) and Christian theology to mean “God’s time” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8). It can also be understood as “the circumstances that open moments of opportunity” and “craft serendipity” (Moxley 2020). Within indigenous knowledge, it can be understood as the ripeness of time, when the fruits and vegetables are naturally ready, setting sail when the tide and the winds are right, allowing fish to spawn and the natural environment to regenerate.

The call for visions, to dream and articulate a New Normal, can be seen as a Kairos moment, a nexus where the currents of ‘reweaving the ecological mat,’ ‘rethinking development’ and ‘rethinking the Blue Pacific’ meet the winds of a global pandemic, a growing movement to rethink capitalism and materialism in response to the climate crisis, and the call for ecological conversion in response to the widespread destruction of this planet’s ecosystem. It is a reminder that the Spirit of God which hovered over the face of the primordial sea before creation was not the gentle breeze that whispered to the prophet Elijah in his hiding place in the mountain (1 Kings 19:11–13), but a creative force capable of reshaping the world.

How do we regain and maintain the creative tension of timelessness and timeliness that has been distorted in the acquiescence to a predatory system of economic extraction which contradicts the purpose of God, through bondage to acquisitiveness, militarisation and consumerism (Brueggemann 2018), and an extractive totalism of the current normal that is contradictory to our Pacific spirituality and indigenous wisdom?

### **Time and Rhythm**

The ocean is a great teacher about timelessness and timeliness and the rhythm in between. “We want to be in fast cars and fast boats; everything is about speed, earning as much as possible as quickly as possible; doing everything at pace,”

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reflected Colin Philp, president of Fiji’s traditional voyaging society, the Uto Ni Yalo Trust, on World Ocean Day 2020. “What we’ve learned from COVID-19 is that the planet needs to slow down, to be at the pace of nature rather than the pace of humankind” (SPC Centre of Ocean Science 2020).

This need to slow down is more than wishful thinking; there are economic and environmental factors also: 75 percent of the fuel imported into the Pacific is used for transport. Sustainable sea transport is advocated by the Uto Ni Yalo Trust and other voyaging societies in the Pacific. The Uto Ni Yalo Trust is

currently engaged in building traditionally designed *camakau* and *drua* (single hull outrigger sailing canoes and double hulled versions) for coastal and island communities, providing training – safety, traditional sailing and navigation techniques – to help communities reclaim their indigenous seafaring knowledge and wisdom. This includes knowing when it is a good time to sail and when it is a good time to stay at home. Using the knowledge and wisdom of the past to secure the future has been a key element in the Uto Ni Yalo’s decade-long mission, spanning the equivalent distance of almost two and a half times around the planet.

“The kids are learning the sounds of nature again. That’s something that has been missing,” says Philp, lamenting the loss of deep relationship with the ocean. “How can our youth be expected to care for the ocean if we don’t have this relationship? Going back to traditional craft is part of rebuilding that relationship with nature, the ocean and everything in it – learning to slow down and appreciate what is under the ocean.” Sustainable sea transport models self-sustainability, resilience and the responsible use of appropriate technology – harnessing the naturally renewable energy of wind, waves and sun. At the same time, it is a valuable lesson on the need to slow down and restore a deep and right relationship with the ocean; to listen and move with the rhythm of the planet.

We have broken time down to micro-seconds, movies are filmed in between 30 to 56 frames per second. Today’s youth and young adults have become hyper-multitaskers, reducing the attention given to meals, conversations and relationships as they eat, talk, chat, use social media and watch a movie, all at the same time. In South Korea, one of the most commonly heard phrases is “pali-pali,” which means “quickly” or “hurry.” As part of the rapid development of the South Korean economy following the Korean War, this functional attitude of handling matters quickly and prematurely was infused into Korean culture. As a result, and quite contradictory to the deontological aspects of Korean culture, the result rather than the process is emphasised, as is expediency, often in development discourse, at the cost of safety. This culture of expediency in all things has usurped Korean traditions of generosity, tolerance and courtesy. The pali-pali culture is recognised in high stress levels within Korean society and related health issues, particularly among men.

Stillness allows for depth, direction and discernment. As one surfer said, “When you are waiting for the wave, you are not doing nothing. You are listening to the ocean, feeling the ocean – its presence, its energy, its life force. You are not

behind the wave trying to catch up. You are not in the wave, getting dumped on the reef, you are anticipating the wave, ready for the right moment to paddle and ride the wave all the way.”

What has been discerned as a result of COVID-19 is that, as United Nations Secretary General António Guterres points out, while there are stories of the “visible, positive impact” of the coronavirus on the environment, “whether through improved air quality or reduced greenhouse gas emissions,” these “are but temporary, because they come on the back of tragic economic slowdown and human distress” (United Nations April 2020). In his message for International Mother Earth Day 2020, Guterres said, “Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action,” adding “we need a shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet. Let’s promote harmony with nature and the Earth” (United Nations April 2020). The brief respite that the land, oceans, rivers and even air have received as a result of COVID-19 induced lockdowns has shown what is possible if humankind allows the earth to experience a Sabbath, a jubilee (PCC April 2020).

### **“Our Time” is Valuable**

One of the indicators that some families no longer know how to spend time together has been the increase in domestic violence cases because of the COVID-19 induced lockdowns. Many were, of course, already situations of violence and abuse that were simply exacerbated by the lockdowns, while some were the result of stress related to unemployment, movement restrictions, and the fear caused by this unseen pandemic. Some were also the result of dysfunctional relationships forced into intensive engagement, as with families and extended families forced to spend time together in the same home for long periods of time.

The busy-ness of life, work, school, sports, cultural, religious and other activities has often served as a distraction from the challenges at home, even in functioning, loving families. A common adage in kava circles is that there are those who drink and enjoy kava, and those who are really at the kava session to ‘drink time’ and stay away from home. Church events can also take priority over family responsibilities and relationships.

The impact of physical distancing, reduction in numbers of social gatherings, and closure of public areas and places of worship has meant that beyond the online virtual world, our physical world shrunk to those in our households. Sunday worship became a whole family experience, with no one being left

behind to prepare lunch or excluded because they were housebound, or due to transportation issues. Some families who were unable to attend church or join virtually with their own community of faith engaged ecumenically with whatever was on television, radio or online, at least until their community of faith developed a virtual presence.

Grandparents, parents and children found themselves engaging more with one another, resulting in intergenerational dialogue increasing. While in some cases this has strained relationships, in many others this has strengthened relationships, through the sharing of indigenous knowledge and practices. These are very important in particular for the young adult and youth population, who are increasingly finding meaning and worth in virtual relationships and communities.

It has been said that for traditional Pacific island communities, relationship is given priority and high value. At its best there is deep respect for the whole community of life – human and non-human. The culture of sharing and caring based on justice is nurtured, and the values of care for creation and respect and fairness for all within the community are nourished (WCC 2001).

As restrictions are relaxed and the physical world expands once more following the pandemic, will we be able to maintain time and space for strengthening relationships within the family and the community? Given the issues of mental health, substance abuse, ongoing violence against women and children, internet pornography, etc., ensuring space and time to strengthen families will be a key task for Pacific communities.

### **The Time is Now – Kairos Moments and Kairos Movements**

COVID-19 has provided a Kairos moment for the articulation of hopeful imagination. This moment is surrounded by lament, by anger, by frustration at the structural injustices that emanate from what Walter Brueggemann describes as “a ‘totalism’ that monopolises the political economy, all technology, and all imagination via control of the media” (cited in Wytsma 2014). These moments give birth to movements such as the *#MeToo* movement against sexual and gender-based violence and patriarchy; and the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement against institutionalised racism against African Americans and, by extension, structural racism in general. When movements such as these reach a critical mass, they have the potential for massive social and political paradigm shifts. A regional example of this is *#WeWantPal*, the current crisis at the University of the South Pacific, where a moment of persecution of the Vice Chancellor and

President, Professor Pal Ahluwalia, for his investigation into corruption at the university has galvanised USP staff and students into a movement for justice and good governance that has, in turn, mobilised the USP Council to step in to prevent the hijacking of a regional educational institution by one country, in this case the Fiji government.

One of the challenges for the Pacific is that our actions sometimes betray our rhetoric, and our Pacific timelessness results in missed opportunities. Our eloquent statements are often hollow, as we are too slow, too passive, and do too little too late. A good example of this is the case of West Papua. The recent case of the Balikpapan 7 (Human Rights Watch June 2020) has echoed the *#BlackLivesMatter* protest movement as Papuan and Moluccan people, who are ethnically Melanesian, have continued to experience structural racism and discrimination from Indonesian authorities and violent oppression and abuse from Indonesian military and police. Within Indonesia there has been criticism of the government by human rights groups, student unions, politicians, and civic and religious leaders from both Papua and wider Indonesia, who have called for the dropping of charges against them. Despite the six decades-long struggle of the Papuan people, the US *#BlackLivesMatter* has received more traction on social media and mainstream media than *#WeBleedBlackAndRed* and other West Papuan advocacy groups.

***“One of the challenges for the Pacific is that our actions sometimes betray our rhetoric, and our Pacific timelessness results in missed opportunities. Our eloquent statements are often hollow, as we are too slow, too passive, and do too little too late. ”***

Last year, during the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, civil society representatives, led by the Pacific Conference of Churches, engaged in a dialogue with Forum leaders and raised the ongoing issue of injustice in West Papua, stating that Pacific regionalism is rooted in Pacific solidarity and that none of us can speak of an inclusive and peaceful Pacific and remain silent on the serious human rights issues for West Papuans. In their responses to the interventions by CSOs, Forum leaders focused on West Papua, including an emotional plea from the late Prime Minister of Tonga, Samuela ‘Akilisi Pohiva,

who said, “Is regionalism a myth, is it real or based on reality? How can they reconcile the concept of leaving no one behind when they are friends with Indonesia? We should not let others control us. We should stand together in solidarity in support of the people of West Papua.”

Yet even though the call by CSOs for Indonesia to allow access of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special mandate holders to West Papua by the 2020 Leaders’ Meeting was echoed in the Leaders’ Communique, very little has been done. Time has gone by as West Papuans remain in a timelessness of racism, violence and exploitation.

The catalysation of the *#WeWantPal* movement in USP campuses across the region has demonstrated that a moment can become a movement in the Pacific, and perhaps that this is a Kairos moment for a new generation of student activism. The Pacific Theological College’s plans to nurture the prophetic task of the church through the practical engagement of students is crucial to supporting the churches’ role in ensuring that Kairos moments are not missed or ignored.

### **Time as Non-linear – the Courage to Revisit the Past and the Future**

Part of the journey of self-determination is the dismantling of oppressive structures. This includes colonial, neocolonial and neoliberal economic narratives. The process of un-weaving, of changing the story, as the Pacific Theological College and its Institute of Mission and Research are doing, the Rethinking Oceania (Rethinking Development) and Rethinking the Household of God initiatives by the Pacific Conference of Churches, and reclaiming and rewriting, dancing and singing indigenous knowledge, art and spirituality by the Oceania Centre are important aspects of this journey of holistic self-determination. Yet these are far from the only attempts to change the story. This process of visioning must include a re-visioning, a reflection and a re-evaluation of expressions and attempts by Pacific Islanders to chart their own voyage and build their own canoes, some of whom may have lost their *mana*, others of whom may never fully explored it.

The terms ‘Pacific Way’ and ‘Melanesian Way’ popularised in the 1970s were early expressions of self-determination. However, as Tomlinson points out, interpretations of the term Pacific Way changed over time, from Ratu Sir Kamiseke Mara’s original usage, referring to an aristocratic view that a “calm transition is the warrant that political action in the islands depends on conversation and consensus rather than confrontation,” to a more anti-colonial “commonly united opposition to foreign influence,” rearticulated in a more

theological way by Bishop Patelisio Finau of Tonga, Father Walter Lini of Vanuatu and others to mean a “fair, locally led, and locally relevant process of development that is also distinctly Christian” (Tomlinson 2019:5). Bernard Narokobi’s articulation of the Melanesian Way, referenced by PCC Moderator Tevita Havea in his article in this publication, was “a total cosmic vision of life in which every event within human consciousness has its personal, communal, spiritual, economic, political and social dimensions. It is, by its very nature, inherently open to change” (Tomlinson 2019:6).

By the 1990’s, the Pacific Way concept was being redefined by Epeli Hau’ofa, through his “Sea of Islands” construct. From a philosophical, poetic and political perspective, Hau’ofa countered the neocolonial view of the Pacific as small island developing states with an alternative vision, celebrating the “large liquid continent” of Oceania with its indigenous wisdom, science and economics – a metaphor which is still used by theologians, anthropologists and development specialists. It is used in discourses on self-determination, Pacific ecumenism and Pacific regionalism, building, as Tomlinson notes, “upon the core idea of Oceania as an interconnected and expansive place to examine its potential for a new kind of development – a specifically theological development in which Pacific cultural contexts create the possibilities for new kinds of global dialogues” (Tomlinson 2019:12).

If the Pacific Way has become a utilitarian phrase that Feleterika Nokise has described as “at best a convenient generalised slogan reserved for political diplomacy, and at worst a misleading description of something that actually does not exist” (2011:95), so too Hau’ofa’s vision has been usurped and demeaned by a political expediency that uses it to promote an image of Pacific regionalism that exists in rhetoric and slogans only.

However, the resurgence of traditional voyaging a decade ago provided a practical, visible example of the interconnectedness of the “liquid continent” in which the ocean is what connects Pacific communities. The *Te Mana o Te Moana* (Spirit of the Ocean) fleet sailed from 2011–2012, visiting fifteen Pacific nations, reviving voyaging culture and advocating for ocean conservation. The voyage was crewed by Pacific Islanders from eleven nations (Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, French Polynesia, New Zealand, Tonga, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Easter Island), and collectively they traversed 210,000 miles of open ocean, training hundreds of first-time sailors along the way.

The growth and flourishing of a vibrant civil society has also been an example of the visible networks across the Pacific in the tradition of the Pacific Way. Tomlinson further highlights the role of Oceanic contextual theology, in particular the *Pacific Journal of Theology* and the work of the Pacific Conference of Churches, in maintaining the visions of the Pacific Way and a self-determining Oceania.

The Old Normal to which we have acquiesced is a predatory system of economic extraction that contradicts the purpose of God through bondage to acquisitiveness, militarisation and consumerism (Brueggemann 2018). We have already recognised that this extractive totalism of the Old Normal is contradictory to our Pacific spirituality and indigenous wisdom. The naming of this destructive totalism and the imagining of alternatives to continuing economic, political and cultural globalisation is articulated by Jesus as the Kingdom of God (John 10:10). This speaks to an economy of abundance at a time when the scarcity model is the dominant narrative. This speaks to the resilience of not only Pacific Islanders, but all humankind. An expression of this at the dawn of the twenty-first century which was articulated by the Pacific churches and offered to the world was the vision of the “Island of Hope.” Referred to in another vision in this collection by Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi, the Island of Hope drew on the positive affirmation that

*... [Pacific] life is significant, valued and celebrated. There is a celebration of life over material wealth... The Island of Hope is in tune with nature and [characterised] by sharing and caring, to which people want to journey in order to celebrate life in all its fullness (Isa. 25:6)... The Island of Hope has the ‘mana’ (power) to draw human beings together. The Island of Hope is sustainable, wholesome, peaceful and all-embracing... The concept of the Island of Hope is not merely a dream. It is founded in reality and has been ‘our normal’ life in our islands (WCC 2001:90).*

Nineteen years later, the questions ‘where is the Island of Hope?’ and ‘what happened to the Island of Hope?’ are stark reminders that the Island of Hope concept has been subverted by the neoliberal extractive ‘normal.’ As we seek to re-weave the strands of the Pacific Way, our interconnectedness as the Liquid Continent and the Island of Hope need to be reconsidered as to what they might contribute to the rethinking and re-envisioning task at hand. The PCC is planning to have a “Revisiting the Island of Hope” *talanoa* in 2021 to mark the second decade since it was presented to the world.

### **Conclusion – from Descendants to Ancestors**

At the heart of these visions are hopes for the future – a future for which we may prepare our children but not see ourselves. With this in mind, perhaps instead of reflecting on the world we have inherited and must live in today and tomorrow, we need to focus on the world that we will leave for others to inherit. Our reclamation and celebration of indigenous knowledge, wisdom and values refers to our ancestors. Our Christian spirituality is the same, beginning with the first humans and extending to patriarchs, prophets, disciples, apostles, church fathers, denominational founders, missionaries and converts.

Yet we stand in our present, already as the past of someone’s future. We are not just descendants and inheritors of knowledge, tradition and sacred responsibilities to creation and society. We are also ancestors of tomorrow. Ultimately, as we seek to create a New Normal that reaches back to the original normal, that encapsulates the fullest meaning of the Pacific Way, that celebrates our Blue Pacific Continent of large ocean states and lives the values of the Island of Hope, we must ask ourselves: “*What kind of ancestor will I be?*”

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Rev. James Bhagwan is married to Maelin and the father of Francisco Xavier and Antonia. James is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Fiji and currently serves the churches in Oceania as General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches. He is a keen Stand Up Paddler and volunteer for the Fijian voyaging society, the Uto Ni Yalo Trust, where he serves as a crew member, chaplain and mentor.

# The Language of Trees and Clams

*Wardley D. Barry-Igivisa*



When my father cuts down trees to plant yams,  
he speaks to them. He summons their spirits  
and they reason beside the *mumupit*.\*  
At harvest he gets enough for a meal.

When my mother goes out to fish for clams,  
she sings a song; she sings softly, sweetly.  
Then she swims into the heart of the sea,  
and brings back home just enough for a meal.

We have an understanding, us and them.  
The land, the sea and our fathers are one.  
We have farmed this land for a thousand suns,  
and we harvest not to hoard but to heal.

But the spirits left when the machines came,  
and with them the language of trees and clams.

\*A pit dug in the ground for cooking food using hot stones.

***About the Author***

Wardley D. Barry-Igivisa was born in 1988 and is originally from Goroka, the Easter Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. He has a BA in Theology. The second eldest of seven children, he was born and raised in Rabaul. He started writing poetry when he was in grade five at Malaguna Primary School. Although he has published a book, *ABC Dreams*, he is still learning the art. His hobbies include anything that is art – reading, writing, painting, photography, etc. He loves languages and pineapples.

# PACIFIC PHILOSOPHY, INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND THE ARTS

## **Pacific Indigenous Values Must Guide the Future**

*Vijay Naidu*



Pacific communities in our ‘sea of islands’ have for millennia been founded on reciprocity, mutual respect, solidarity and caring for the most vulnerable – giving rather than taking, and taking only what was needed.

These values moulded human relationships and the relationship with Mother Nature, the terrestrial and oceanic flora and fauna. While there were social status differences between leaders and followers, the group ensured that everyone had shelter and no one went hungry. The economy was embedded in the social. All able-bodied persons had access to land and marine resources. These were looked after with a view both to enhancing their productivity over time and providing for future generations.

Pacific indigenous values must guide the vision for a New Normal as the environmentally, economically, socially and politically bankrupt capitalist world order seeks to reinvent itself.

***About the Author***

Professor Vijay Naidu is a Pacific Development Scholar and a social justice activist. He has been an active supporter of civil society movements to address poverty, homelessness, human rights and constitutional governance.

# **HULIAU: ‘Āina Aloha Economic Futures Declaration: A Call for Unity from the Hawaiian Islands**

*Manulani Meyer, Ikaika Hussey, and friends from Hawai‘i*

Every crisis opens a course to opportunity. Some of the world’s greatest accomplishments were born from adversity by those who were inherently equipped with vision and resolve. The COVID-19 pandemic will leave a saga of sorrow, loss and frustration, with an equal and overwhelming amount of sacrifice, heroism and victory. This New Normal has thrust us into what our kūpuna Hawai‘i would call a *huliau*, or a turning point and time of change, for all of us who call Hawai‘i home.

While we are reeling from this visceral reminder of how vulnerable we are to external impacts on our *‘āina aloha*, or beloved homeland, our history as a resilient people is undeniable. The Native Hawaiian community in particular is one that for centuries has fought to overcome obstacles that all of us here in Hawai‘i are now faced with. Whether rebounding from infectious diseases that decimated our population or successfully advocating for equitable remedies from government systems, these challenges are today ones that we confront as a collective.

Now perhaps more than ever, the ancestral values that guided us through these challenges and numerous others provide a pivotal leverage point for all of us as we set a course towards a stronger, sustainable Hawai‘i and seize this opportunity for *huliau*.

## **Guiding Principles**

- **‘Āina Aloha:** We are of and from this ‘āina that ultimately sustains us. We employ strategies for economic development that place our kuleana so as to steward precious, limited resources in a manner that ensures our long-term horizon as a viable island people and place.
- **‘Ōpū Ali‘i:** Our leaders understand that their privilege to lead is directly dependent on those they serve. From the most vulnerable to the most privileged, we seek to regenerate an abundance that provides

for everyone. Decision makers understand and embrace their duty and accountability to Community. Our social, economic and government systems engage and respond to a collective voice in integrative ways to balance power and benefit.

- *‘Imi ‘Oi Kelakela*: We are driven by creativity and innovation, constantly challenging the status quo. We are mindful and observant of needs, trends and opportunities and seek new knowledge and development opportunities in ways that enhance our way of life without jeopardizing our foundation of ‘āina aloha.
- *Ho‘okipa*: We are inclusive and embrace the collective that will call Hawai‘i home, grounded in the fundamental understanding that it is our kuleana to control and manage our resources in a way that allows us to fulfill our role as hosts here in our ‘āina aloha.

### **Future Directions**

These principles will calibrate our course not only to recovery but rediscovery of our potential as a unique people and place. Over the past five decades, we have seen local, national and international models of social, educational, agricultural and economic resiliency emerge from our Hawaiian community. This is due in no small part to a grounding in these foundational values. We have been here for millennia and will be for many more. There is nowhere else we could or would choose to be. We are committed to this kuleana of ‘āina aloha and ensuring the sustainability of this place and those who choose to make it home.

As we seek to engage at decision making tables, adding value and insight to Hawai‘i’s economic path forward post-COVID-19, we implore and invite you to support and engage with us. From health care, education and digital innovation to food security, tourism and affordable housing strategies, we are mākaukau for this imminent *huliau!*

*This document was made by Kanaka ‘Ōiwi o Hawai‘i – by Native Hawaiians from ka pae ‘āina o Hawai‘i. Many of us have signed the document and work to emulate the four principles: ‘āina aloha, ‘ōpū ali‘i, ‘imi ‘oi kelakela, and ho‘okipa. Please join us! Contact any Hawaiians you may know and share this*

*document with them. We are here to support our cousins within moana-nui-ākea! We are here to help in the larger HULIAU!*

Ho‘oulu lāhui o moana-nui-ākea!  
Let our nations rise together!





## “Light my way”

Where is the star path? Kaveinga lit a path that led to this painting. We must all find the star path. A path that begins from within ourselves.

**Painting by: Benjamin Dickson**

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## Kaveinga – Where is the Star Path?

*Seu'ula J. Fua, Kaumatua Parekura*



It is said that there is nothing new under the sun. In my lifetime, I have witnessed tropical cyclones, earthquakes, volcanoes, new islands, sinking islands, disappearing islands, drought, floods and tsunamis. I have witnessed the brain drain, skills drain, civil unrest, challenge of the monarchy, change of government, loss of the national bank, loss of the national airline. But I have also witnessed the installation of two kings, reverse of the brain drain, new skilled immigrants and the *Mate Ma'a* Tonga rugby league team defeat the world champions in a sea of red. I am now living the New Normal of life under COVID-19. I have no doubt that the future will continue to bring natural and man-made challenges.

In such a time as this, we are asked for a 'new' vision for our region. I am afraid that I have no 'new' vision, nor do I have a vision. Setting visions are for leaders and people who have followers – I have neither of those. I am a mother, a wife, an aunt, a daughter and a sister. I have several responsibilities – as a Sunday school teacher, chair of a board of trustees for an NGO, and an Oceanic research practitioner. I live in Tonga, I belong to a few large clans, to a church community, and to an extensive network of professionals. All these communities spread across national, regional and global contexts. It is from this position of identity, experiences and beliefs that I present my humble view in relation to a 'new' vision for our region.

### **Kaveinga, the Old Star Path**

At a time when our *Kalia* and *Drua* travelled freely across borders, our people sailed by the stars, the signs of nature, and the feel of the currents. History tells of *kaivai* (sailors) who could put their hands into the ocean and declare ‘we are in Fiji waters.’ History tells of great voyages of discovery, of purposeful settlements, of trade and of war in our region, long before Captain Cook drew up the maps that eventually carved up our expansive Ocean home.

The *Kaveinga* is the star path that guided our ancient travellers. “The star path, that is, the succession for rising or setting guiding stars down which one steers, was known as the ‘*avei’a*’ (Ellis 1831, cited in Lewis 1992:168) by the Tahitians, and since in Tahitian *k* and *ng* are replaced by the glottal stop (‘), this is analogous to the *Kaveinga* of the Tongans and the *kavenga* of Tikopia. Writing of Tikopian voyaging, Firth explains that “the major navigational guide is the Star-path, the Carrier” (*Kavenga*). This is a succession of stars towards which the bow of the canoe is pointed. Each is used as a guide when it is low in the heavens; as it rises up overhead it is discarded and the course is reset by the next one in the series. One after another these stars rise till dawn” (Firth 1954:91).

Andia y Varela, who led the Spanish expedition that visited Tahiti between Cook’s two voyages, and who was in Tahiti in 1774, wrote:

*When the night is a clear one they steer by the stars; and this is the easiest navigation for them because these being many [in number], not only do they note by them the bearings on which the several islands with which they are in touch lie, but also the harbors in them, so that they make straight for the entrance by following the thumb of the particular star that rises or sets over it; and they hit it off with as much precision as the most expert navigator of civilized nations could achieve (cited in Lewis 1994:286).*

Today, in the modern Tongan language, the word *Kaveinga* is generally used to refer to a ‘theme,’ ‘topic’ and sometimes a ‘vision.’ For most, the original meaning of the *Kaveinga* is lost in history. In this paper, I use both interpretations of the word *Kaveinga*, as the ‘vision’ as well as the ‘star path.’

### **COVID-19 – a Season of Darkness?**

The current global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus has affected the globe in an unprecedented way that our generation has never before witnessed. There is already massive literature on the impact of the COVID-19 around the globe, so I will not dwell further on this. Here in our region, while

most of our Pacific Island states are COVID-19 free, the economic impact has, however, hurt livelihoods and national government budgets. For Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji, unfortunately, we were also struck by Cyclone Harold at the tail end of the cyclone season.

Here at home, we are experiencing some hardship as we begin to feel the economic impacts of the pandemic. But perhaps more obvious for us are the restrictions on social gatherings and the curfews. We are ignoring social distancing, as that is just not happening; we continue to see busloads packed with students, and churches are still packed with people. But the social restrictions are redefining our cultural protocols and ceremonies. In particular, we are seeing smaller, shorter, simpler funeral protocols. Similarly, we are seeing smaller birthday and wedding ceremonies. Most people I talk to agree that these new protocols are far more affordable, more intimate, and are a return to ‘how things used to be.’ Even people within our church community are saying that one church service on Sunday, with a greater focus on family prayers, is agreeable for them. For our family, as for most families, there is an added effort to plant and grow more vegetables, fruits and root crops. We see more and more containers packed full with root crops being shipped to families in Salt Lake City and Brisbane. But the fish market is now being prioritised for the local market and encouraging local economic growth. Although we miss our family members who are not yet able to return because of our closed borders, there is a general public consensus that we should keep our borders closed for now.

One truth that we can almost be certain about is that we live in a world of increasing challenges, be it a global pandemic or climate change; and we will always have to adapt to these challenges.

### **Kaveinga – a ‘new’ vision**

At this critical time, I ask: *Where is the star path – the Kaveinga – that once led our people forward and to new destinations? Have we lost the clarity of the star path, our Kaveinga? Where do we find a vision that builds our resilience against our multifaceted challenges?*

I would like to propose that the *Kaveinga* or star path has always been based on our faith (*Lotu*) and our clans (*Kainga*). These two stars of *Lotu* and *Kainga* are our agents of resilience that have guided us through millennia and allowed us to thrive in isolation in our communities in this expansive Ocean. Our cultures have survived through colonialism, world wars and globalisation because of our resilience.

There are different definitions of resilience, depending on the approach taken and the level of analysis. The definitions of resilience can be drawn from genetic, epigenetic, developmental, economic, cultural and sociological perspectives. The definitions of resilience can also be broad depending on the level of study, and whether it is at the level of the individual, family, community or culture. But there is a general agreement that resilience includes a “concept of healthy, adaptive, or integrated positive functioning over the passage of time in the aftermath of adversity” (Southwick *et al.* 2014:5).

**“I would like to propose that the *Kaveinga* or star path has always been based on our faith (*Lotu*) and our clans (*Kainga*). These two stars of *Lotu* and *Kainga* are our agents of resilience that have guided us through millennia and allowed us to live in isolation in our communities in this expansive Ocean. ”**

From a Tongan perspective, we have several proverbs that speak to our hopeful nature, our determination, and our adaptive and innovative skills. These proverbs include:

<i>Kina ‘umu tali ki tahi:</i>	Although it is not certain, we will wait with anticipation.
<i>Lusia ki Taulanga:</i>	Despite rough sea conditions, we will still sail on with a focus on reaching the harbour.
<i>Alaisia Alaikolonga:</i>	[Be] skillful, adaptive, innovative.

Finding the old star path – the *Kaveinga* – is perhaps what is required at this point in time. Finding a new vision during these times of crisis suggests that we have perhaps forgotten the old star path. Can we see the *Kaveinga* of *Lotu* and *Kainga* clearly? What is clouding the *Kaveinga*? How did we get to a point when the *Kainga* (our clan) became a burden rather than a source of strength? How did we get to a point when the *Lotu* became a financial hardship rather than a blessing? How did we get to a point where we had to take out a loan to bury

our dead? What is the unnecessary white noise that is preventing us from seeing the *Kaveinga* clearly? Has the season of darkness blinded us so that we can no longer see the old star path – the *Kaveinga*? How can we refocus and see the *Kaveinga* more clearly?

I am not proposing what the new vision may be, I am proposing that in the design of a new vision for our region we re-look at the *Kaveinga*, the star path that guided us through millennia and allowed us to thrive on these islands – that is, our *Kainga* and our *Lotu*. The *Kaveinga*, the old star path, is our *Kainga* and our *Lotu* – our communities and our faith. I propose that our agents of resilience be founded on our social sources of strength drawn from our *Kainga* (our social ecological system) and our *Lotu* (human agency).

### ***Kainga***

Our social capital, our social networks, our families, our communities, our identities are as relational people who see the world in a particular way, who value being in relationships, who value interdependence, who value the sharing of resources, being responsible for others, self-sacrifice, *mamahi'i me'a* (loyalty), *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *loto to* (humility) and *feveingtokai'aki* (reciprocity).

In today's world of work, we are waking up to the realisation that the 'soft skills' are just as important if not more important than the technical skills. The abilities to work as a team, collaborate, build and sustain networks are now key skills of the work force. Hiring of new staff now requires these soft skills that we have often ignored in the past. A student's ethics, behaviour and, in the future, the lawyer's, doctor's or teacher's professionalism are all built on the work ethic and behaviour 'taught' at school, at Sunday School, in the village and at home. The concept of *Kainga*, when internalised rightly, teaches the soft skills of collaboration, networking, relationships, ethics and team work. It is about sharing of resources, pooling together limited resources to achieve tasks far greater than an individual can achieve on his or her own. In this era, it is no longer about competition but about collaboration and working together towards larger projects and creating lasting impact. In fact, these are the new skills required for the new 'work from home' era, where high trust, agility and adaptability are necessary.

In this *Kainga* concept, we also find that learning is a much more utilitarian and practical context. It is without a doubt that our current education system still fails a larger percentage of students than those that it serves and who

continue on to universities. In a *Kainga* context, the skills required are related to improving livelihoods (as in communal agriculture, fishing and handicrafts) and the cohesiveness of the community.

### ***Lotu***

Nearly seventy years after Jürgen Moltman's *Theology of Hope* was published (1964 [1993]), his theology based on the coming of God's kingdom remains relevant. His theology of hope describes the 'coming of God' with a focus on the future. The theology of hope, argues Moltmann, focuses on visions and dreams that allow the imagination to go beyond the reality of our present into what is possible. The discourse on hope is extremely important today, as a global community and as Pacific people who are trying to deal with the challenges of a global pandemic, climate change, migration, and other socio-political challenges of our time. The discourse on hope asks the churches to play a more realistic role in providing people with hope and coping mechanisms in times of crises, hardship and natural devastation. Moltmann has argued that "Christian theology needs to hold together the Christian, the public and the academic communities as an all-embracing function of the kingdom of God" (cited in Brown 2016).

***“Even before Christianity, faith has always been with us. We are a spiritual people... In the midst of deaths, crises and hardships, we remain hopeful... It is that faith and the hope it produces that gives us confidence that we will survive through the trials and turbulence in our lives. In our theology of hope, we hold on to God's coming. ”***

Even before Christianity, faith has always been with us. We are a spiritual people who have always believed in a higher being, that our life here on earth was temporary and there was to be another place, be it *Pulotu* or Heaven. In the midst of death, crises and hardships, we remain hopeful, and trust that God has plans for our lives and will bring a better tomorrow. It is that faith and the hope it produces that gives us confidence that we will survive through the trials and turbulence in our lives. In our theology of hope, we hold on to God's coming.

## Conclusion

I strongly believe that we are at an opportune time to clarify our star path, and more importantly to find a new or old vision (*kaveinga*) for our time. At this ‘crossroads’ between the pre-COVID-19 period and this crisis, we may use the collective wisdom of our ancestors to redefine a more holistic vision for our children and the world that will be theirs. Building a new vision for our region must continue the systematic re-engineering of our social, economic and political structures so that we may be clearer about the star path – in the *Lotu* and *Kainga* where we find our resilience. We need, as a community of Pacific people, to behave as true *Kainga* with high hopes for a better tomorrow, and to come together to draw a new *Kaveinga* for our region.

I do not know what our new collective vision may be or should be, as that is a collective task for all of us. However, as a mother with two young children, my hope is for a society that is founded on two wishes. One is that our society supports the weaving of a strong network of relationships among relatives and friends. This will be a strong web of social support that ensures us that one day, when some are in need, they can call on their *kainga* for support, and that they themselves will help others in their *kainga*. And my second hope is that when they walk through the shadow of the deep valleys, they will not be afraid as they know that the ever-loving God will never abandon them. In essence, this will be a society that builds the resilience of children so that they may be able to thrive in the local as well as the global world.

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***About the Author***

Dr. Seu'ula Johansson-Fua is Tongan and lives with her husband and two children on what she calls a 'farm' on the island of Tongatapu. Seu'ula and her family belong to the Free Church of Tonga and work hard to balance work, family and community responsibilities. During Tonga's lockdown, she learned to bake and plant all kinds of fruits and root crops. Seu'ula is the Chair of the MORDI Board of Trustees, an NGO that works with over 130 rural communities throughout Tonga. She is currently the Director of the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific.

# Respect for our Ancestors – Message to Our Oceanic Region

*Suliana Siwatibau*



I am grateful for this opportunity to express some concerns and ideas to help navigate the future voyage of our Pacific region. As Oceanic nations, occupying the largest water mass in the world, we have a collective responsibility to keep our oceanic continent healthy and sacred – respecting our relationships with it just as our ancestors before us did. We are a diverse group of peoples with differing ancestries, having voyaged to the Pacific from different lands. Now we are one as settlers of the islands of the Pacific, bound by our common watery continent and united by our desire to seek a common path forward for the sake of all our futures. Our efforts to do so need to be informed by our differences, reflecting our strengths and the adaptive strategies we have developed separately to survive in our different island environments.

I raise below some features of my own society that are reflected, to differing extents through similar means, in other Pacific societies:

One of the traits we practice in our traditional communities is *inclusivity*. This we do through strict rules regarding the roles allocated to our children, women and men, commoners and chiefs in our communities' everyday lives. In Fiji we acknowledge others' ancestry as we meet them and thereby show respect for the individual as part of a larger community and ancient male lineage. Other people of non-Pacific ancestry may find our communications strange and sometimes unbearably long-winded. However, it is the introduction of our long lineages or

ancestry that clears the way to acceptance as we become better known to those we meet for the first time.

*Good governance* is another vital trait to help guide our countries forward into the coming decades. Its importance has been especially clear since our world population has been tragically impacted by the pandemic spread of COVID-19. In order to move forward to a better world, we need to examine more closely how we have treated our current world and identify well the lessons we learn from such scrutiny.

A major lesson evident from the handling of the current world pandemic is the importance of the vital good governance feature of *transparency*. News discussions on the internet relate that the information on the COVID-19 epidemic in China had been suppressed for a while. The role of the WHO during the time of the initial outbreak of the virus remains unclear. As most of you would have been aware, the Wuhan doctor who first raised concern about the disease was taken into custody and has since died. This lack of transparency during a strategic stage of the then epidemic may have changed the development of the pandemic from a more manageable level to the massive global scale of misery we have witnessed.

Another important feature of good governance that became obvious during this pandemic is *accountability*. On examination of the numbers of people affected and the deaths from COVID-19 in the different countries compared with their populations, the role of accountable leadership has been notable in some cases. No doubt the true situation will become clearer once the pandemic is over.

These are only two qualities of leadership that stood out for me from a quick overview of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hopefully our young people will take note of these as our countries move forward to the future. Good governance must feature *transparency and accountability*.

### **Our Changing Societies in a Changing Natural World**

Our societies have lived on these islands linked by our Oceanic continent for many centuries. They have developed close linkages with features of nature that surround them in their respective islands and have learned to utilise them sustainably for their survival. Early European explorers noted the large populations of inhabitants that they encountered in several island groups, while others who visited later noted the decimation of the same populations through introduced diseases.

Along with the reduction in populations, we have also undergone a loss in traditional acknowledgement of the sacredness of nature. Our ancestors recognised special natural features and locations within our island groups that they considered sacred and kept mostly untouched. How did they identify these areas? What were the reasons for their sacredness and need for conservation? How can our modern environment planners and policy makers take these sacred areas officially into account?

Now our populations have increased again within a heavily interlinked world. We have much to learn from the rest of the world, but also much to share. One of these lessons is our respect for our ancestors. We need to re-examine our belief systems regarding how we link with our land and sea and the resources we gain therefrom. I need not remind you of the respect we place on different features of our lands, our trees and our animals. One of the outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic is the increased concern over humanity's exploitation and disrespect of nature. Governments of the future need to take better care of our environment and to respect our ancestors' demarcation of land and ocean resources for different reasons. They will have the benefit of being able to access information from both the ancient wisdom and modern scientific discoveries regarding our natural environment.

***“One of the outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic is the increased concern over humanity’s exploitation and disrespect of nature. Governments of the future need to take better care of our environment and to respect our ancestors’ demarcation of land and ocean resources for different reasons.”***

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, I wish to emphasise the importance of our island societies' experience of life and governance in their respective island groups. I hope that young Pacific Islanders will take pride in their roots and contribute the Pacific experience to world discussions of humanity going forward.

*About the Author*

Mrs Suliana Siwatibau began professional work as a secondary school science teacher. She later joined the USP teaching staff, and then moved to UNDP, after which she became an independent consultant in various development fields. She is a widow with four children and five grandchildren. She is retired to a small farm where she collects heirloom varieties of traditional crops such as taro, breadfruit, bananas and yams, and demonstrates their cultivation through customary organic methods.

# To Go Back is to Go Forward

*Susana Tuisawau*



## THE PRELUDE –

*Amidst the vast stretch of the watery desert  
Where the greatest ocean on earth is centred,  
In all their glory of fringing palms and golden sand  
Arise the Pacific Islands – an oasis of a way of life  
So uniquely different from the world outside;  
Created by God’s design to exist in their own good time and tide  
And though small and scattered far and wide,  
Have an uncanny commonality in their ability to adapt and survive*

*Etched into one’s vision when recounting the indigenous Pacific way of life  
Is how deeply steeped it is in tradition, customs, culture and artistic design;  
How appropriate its technology is – eked out of what is locally found;  
Its epistemology and wisdom – home-grown, brilliant and profound,  
Aptly guiding a life of communal living that sows caring and giving;  
And compelling deep respect and commitment to religious faith and Authority  
Along with harmonious living with nature, rivers, land and sea  
To reap good health, peace and security and that “Pacific self-sufficiency”*

*With colonialism, independence and globalisation I see a shift,  
From subsistence living and a philosophy of reciprocity  
Where good relationship is wealth – to wealth only in material things,  
From people as profit – to profit before people and shady political deals.  
From naturally healthy immune systems to induced immunisation and NCDs  
From a governance and leadership where the young bide their time*

*To go through the mill, observing and learning by the aged's side  
To a new western style defying what the wisdom of the land says is lasting and  
right.*

*The list does not end there, for the shift goes on  
From wind and water-driven transport  
To mechanised travel, carbon foot-printing and all  
From the environment being an ally to ravaging it like a foe under siege  
By digging for a few dollars more to enrich the corporate and the already  
rich.*

*So how do we correlate the two scenarios of a way of life and Covid Nineteen?  
It's the need for self-sufficiency by utilising the good of the Pacific past to halt  
The global dependencies of today; hence, to go back is to go forward for all.*

### **To Go Back is to Go Forward**

To recognise and honour indigenous people's rights as embodied in ILO Convention 169 by all regional governments is of paramount importance. Note, however, that the UNDRIP is still a Declaration. Nevertheless, it will help facilitate the institutionalisation of the Pacific Way of Life and the coming to life of the following visions and radical concepts. These will also help us to lower our dependencies on global narratives, and to liberate and disentangle ourselves and our people from global corporations and financial institutions.

*They have stood on our necks long enough!*

(a) *Honour and mainstream the traditional wealth and currency of indigenous people:* For example, their *tapa*, *tabua*, shell money, mats, their collective or individual labour, root crops such as yams, *dalo* or *tavioka*, and pigs or fish, should be officially/legally recognised as legitimate wealth for trade. Many children of the Pacific have not been able to have an education, afford medical services, or pay for a boat or a decent home because they did not have the dollar. Yet they are rich with this traditional wealth. Valuing these forms of wealth will encourage our indigenous people to return to the land and sea and to refocus on the utilisation of their land and *qoliqoli* (fishing grounds), sustainable farming practices, collective planning and working, and water management. These should, in turn, amplify their collective income and savings, and familiarise themselves to work together, not only as a social unit but also as an economic unit. The traditional barter system must be legitimised, with its own set of legal and standards frameworks,

to make it an acceptable economic system. As we have seen, it is being revived during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it can sustain itself in the future, even in times of crisis.

(b) *Resourcing and investment in research, education, and valuing the following:*

- Establish a Pacific Institute of Indigenous Studies and Technology where appropriate indigenous technology and the arts can focus on achieving self-sufficiency in the Pacific.
- Develop building architecture that can withstand Category 5 cyclones and flooding, and that incorporates a boat-house design so that buildings will automatically float when water rises.
- Research and education should enhance understanding and the efficient use of traditional healers and practices, and traditional healing herbs should be officially recognised.
- We should have a medical research database, and national bureaus of statistics in our regional countries.
- Enhance the use of wind and solar power; horses for transport in rural areas, especially in remote areas where there is no need for roads; and building big canoes like our ancestors did for sea transport between the islands.

(c) *Adopt a de-urbanisation and decentralisation model of development, directing everything to the provinces/rural areas – from higher education, all medical services and public health to all government services, public sports facilities, gymnasiums, food canning factories and communication infrastructures – to improve connectivity among all rural villages, settlements and schools. These should be the impetus for de-urbanisation.*

(d) *If economics continues in its current form, then alleviating poverty in the Pacific region will never be resolved. Regional governments have not been able to resolve this. At the PIFS level, trade unions are absent or not directly invited. The point is that most Pacific people are dependent on workers who have been paying for all services and goods. Workers run all industries: from tourism, manufacturing, transport and infrastructure to education and medical services. Therefore, there must be a minimum wage policy that is not less than F\$10 an hour. This should enable all Pacific workers to save and Pacific people to become local tourists, using hotels when a pandemic like COVID-19 strikes. Charge all banks a “Social Responsibility Tax” which can be diverted to assist this. *Where there is a will, there is a way.**

***About the Author***

Mrs. Susana Tuisawau is a proud Fijian woman. An educationist and a trade unionist, she is currently the Executive Director of the Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women. She was the former Secretary General of the Council of Pacific Education, President of the Fijian Teachers Association, and former Chair of SPOCTU (South Pacific Council of Trade Unions).

# **Our Source of Resilience and Sustainability: Indigenous Knowledge, Skills and Art**

*Sashi Kiran*



Our Pacific ancestors were voyagers, risk takers and conquerors! When most thought that the world was flat, the ancestors of this Ocean looked at the stars and set sail beyond the horizons. They built their own canoes for trade and war, and to win over giant reefs that were not even mapped. Having travelled through bigger nations, they decided to take their chances and settled on the small islands in the Southern Ocean. They developed sustainable ways of building, fishing and farming. Composting, as we know it now, was a practice. When root crops were dug, the waste was buried back in the soil.

They knew the seasons of food, including seafood, developing different and sustainable ways of harvesting, preservation and preparation. Boats and houses were built from natural materials, yet able to withstand the storms. They knew how to adapt to the changing of the tides and storms. They developed their own skills to confront the dangers that surrounded them. They warred, traded and built friendships and kinships across the Ocean. On their voyages, they collected nutritious foods. Some of the naturally growing trees, ferns and crops sit on top of the nutrition charts around the world. Other travellers and settlers to the region, including my own ancestors, contributed their own traditional knowledge as well as herbs, spices and crops in demand in the global world today for their nutritional and medicinal properties. The trading system of barter was alive, long before the region was colonised.

Our elders did not learn survival skills in classrooms or formal education systems, yet their skills were unmatched; they were survival heroes. They developed kinships and relationships across the Pacific. These have stood the test of time, and are one of the most valuable resources still with us today – the strong shared values systems. In a world where capitalism, especially neoliberal economics, has commodified human relationships in the past 40 years, our region is still blessed with strong kinships and relationships – people with the land and sea, and with each other across the Pacific.

In the past, simple living kept Pacific peoples in a harmonious relationship with nature. This is what sustained our people. It was the legacy and the ‘capital’ that was passed down through the generations. As protectors of natural resources, the totems included special plants, animals, rivers and seas. Elders of the Ocean took it as their responsibility to be *Trustees of the Land and the Sea*, and developed systems of crop rotation and taboos to take care of these resources.

**“We owe it to our future generations to be able to hold our leaders accountable for the decisions they make, and to safeguard the values and principles of indigenous and local knowledge and experiences.”**

However, over the years this relationship has been weakening due to an introduced form of economics that priced everything in dollar values. The caring for and management of resources were taken over by central governments that were elected by us to look after and manage our conflicting interests and resources. Eventually, these leaders who were trusted to manage our relationship with the natural world and resources failed us, evidenced by the degradation of land, sea and rivers. Foreign investments, business interests and the commercial value of our resources have all been prioritised.

Our education system also failed many of us. It taught us how to make money but not how to protect the legacy of our ancestral indigenous knowledge and ways of being. It failed to teach us sustainability, so that future generations will also benefit. Many of our foreign investors store their ‘gold’ – their profits – offshore. Have we accurately assessed the REAL benefits of all the foreign investments we have courted – in tourism, forestry, fisheries and mining? We have ‘sold’ our land, seas and forests, and for what? Locals are banned from fishing and harvesting for their own family and commercial use. Yet hundreds

of foreign fishing boats have been raping our seas for decades. Chemicals are dumped in our waterways and rubbish disposed in our pristine forests. Environmental Impact Assessments have become tools of cover-up instead of true consultation, evidenced by the loss of livelihoods and the degradation of nature in almost all major foreign investment projects.

Our traditional guardians have slowly lost their say and their survival knowledge and skills are not mainstreamed or taught in our education system. Instead, our people and our youth are being educated in an education system that is extractive – they are taught how to extract the commercial value of our resources. The knowledge, arts and skills in ‘reading nature to predict seasons, food, festivities and storms’ and in ‘reading the stars, which enabled the Ocean guardians to sail among our islands’ have faded away. The skill of building long-distance travel canoes could still be used to monitor and look after our oceans and resources. But where did we lose all this knowledge, art and skills? If the investment was paying off, would we be having collapsing health services and infrastructure, outdated school systems, and poor access to water and sanitation that are the current realities for our people in the region?

Imagine a world where technology and our indigenous knowledge, skills and art are combined. We could be mapping our Ocean with our traditional knowledge of reading the stars, marine life and weather, and using technology to equip the guardians of our resources to ensure that our Ocean is protected and sustained for future generations. Our children could be learning skills that teach adaptation to a changing world, and survival skills that could assist them no matter how much the world changes. But this can only happen if we adopt a different development model. Without seeking validation from the outside world, we need to learn to be proud of our heritage and build our capacity to reduce our dependency on handouts. We owe it to our future generations to be able to hold our leaders accountable for the decisions they make, and to safeguard the values and principles of indigenous and local knowledge and experiences.

Indigenous life systems have well demarcated roles, which enabled them to function over centuries. There are generations of knowledge and skills in fishing, medicine, child care, education and mentoring, carpentry, architecture, farming, canoe and house building, and so much more. These are knowledge and skills that protect and sustain available resources, and which suit the climatic conditions in the region. We need to change our education system so that all this knowledge and these skills can be taught and learned and can equip

our people and youth to prepare better for the future. Instead of focusing on imported resources and skills, we need to reflect and bring our indigenous skills into mainstream education.

The Pacific system of communication is through the art of storytelling in its many forms: poetry, dance, music, language, rituals, stories, legends and myths. These various communication mediums transmit indigenous knowledge and sustain kinships, relationships and connection to nature – ocean, land and sky. Again, these forms of communication are not taught in mainstream education. Unless these relationships are established and shared, no real conversation and no meaningful development can take place.

We have often seen a lot of blame placed on our Pacific people for development projects that are considered not sustainable by donors, governments and businesses. But most often, these development projects are conditioned and planned by foreign ‘experts’ based on their understandings of development. There is no consideration given to learning what is of real value to our people. Have they learned that there is no such thing as direct communication, paper trails and development planning without engaging and consulting the existing systems of relationships with persons, communities and nature, and without understanding the stories and values of our people? These are necessary for meaningful, relevant and sustainable development projects to happen.

Every tourist advertisement is about trying to lure those who are stuck in the ‘rat race’ of money-making to *pause* by visiting and enjoying our ‘pristine environment’ in the Pacific. This is possible because much their world has lost its ‘pristine environment’ due to their extractive model of development. And now the same thing is happening in the Pacific. Isn’t it time our young people learned the value of totems, learn about the real value of our resources, and how to protect these as our legacy of sustainability? We need a different model of development.

In times of global economic crises, our region with its small population and connectivity will not have a voice or sit high on global agendas. If we are left to fend for ourselves, we will need to develop or strengthen the resilience that our ancestors were known for and passed down through the generations, where we will be able to utilise our indigenous knowledge and skill sets to sustain our resources, our kinships and relationships within and across the region. This will enable us to survive and thrive.

I believe we can build strong food systems to sustain our people. We are blessed with an abundance of food, and ancient techniques of preservation. We have chemical-free food, gluten-free food options, and sustainable organic food to offer that the world economy requires. We have strong human values that the world is desperate to experience, and we have connectivity and relationships that strengthen us as a people. All of these could become the basis for a Pacific trading block for our region and globally. But this is only possible if our leaders in government, our traditional leaders and custodians of our resources and value systems, and our young leaders are able to rise up and reconnect us with nature and our resources. In doing this, we will be honouring our ancestors who were skillful risk-takers, warriors who adapted to the changing times, and who have left their legacy to be continued by us and our generations to come.

***About the Author***

Ms Sashi Kiran is a development practitioner based in Lautoka, Western Fiji. She is the founder of an NGO, Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND), which focuses on social, economic and health empowerment of communities to overcome poverty.

# Our New Story must Value our Diverse Pasifiki Philosophies

*Tevita Tonga Mohenoa Puloka*



## **“In Tonga, a Straight Line is only a Curve” – A One-Act Play**

In Tonga, in Tonga, a straight line is only a curve.

(1) ‘I Tonga, ‘i Tonga, ko e laine hangatonú‘oku ngaofe pē  
(Sung in English and in Tongan, with respective choreography)

(1) God is One.....God is One.....God is One  
God is Great...God is Majestic...God is Power  
All Glory and Honour belong to God and to  
God alone are Justice and Freedom and Goodness.

(2) That’s the Problem. How come One God but  
Many People? I prefer Many Gods for Many People  
Because Strong and Powerful People take sides  
with One Strong and Powerful God. How about us, the many  
God’s People?

(3) Listen, you Pagans and God-forsaken Tongans:  
True God is One, so says the Holy Bible  
And you’d better believe it or else you go straight  
To Hell where all the unbelievers are burnt to ashes.

(4) But you see, it is not only difficult but it is not very good to think individually about God. In doing so, an Individualistic Image of God is forced upon us. Therefore, One individualistic God has nothing to do with us, a Communitarian People. We desire a Communitarian God.

(4A) Hey, hey.....they may be right. You know how they say that God is different and yet the same to everyone?

(5) Forget it. It's their idea of God, not us. Do you really want to go to Heaven? Hey there, you tribal savage unbelievers! (2).

(6) Oh Yes, oh yes, oh yes, we are on our way there (2).

(7) To go to Heaven is an individual decision, for you cannot take anyone else but you yourself alone, period.

(8) If so, then your heaven is a wrong heaven for us. Because our Heaven is a Very Big Fale that takes all of us. And the Road to Heaven is never made for Individuals But only for People. 'Io ko e hala ki Hevaní 'oku 'ikai ngaohi ia Ma'ae Fakafo'ituituí ka na'e ngaohi pe ia ma'ae Kakaí.

(9) But the Holy Bible says that the road to Heaven is straight and narrow. Therefore, you as a tribe cannot enter Heaven because it is an individual choice and decision. You as an individual must accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

(10) Hey mannnnn. Don't you see I do not wish to go alone to Heaven, because the road is too long and too rugged, so it is better to go in groups of friends, family, and relatives to keep company and to help each other on the road. Besides, if you go alone you will be sent back to bring a friend to Heaven. Heaven, after all, is a home of friends, and the friendless.

(10A) Take a friend to Heaven? to Heaven? Gosh, it's not like you take your grandmother to the beach or something!

(11) Hey, you savage and uncivilised Islanders, why do you insist on group entry? Don't you see that the road is straight and narrow?

(12) Who said that a straight line has to be a stiff line, horizontally or vertically in perpendicular to some Pythagorean right angle triangle.....whatever! A straight line is only for individuals since each is absolutely independent of one another. In a communitarian society such a straight line is antagonistic and therefore destructive.

(12A) Oh my, oh my. These people are so unbelievable. They just don't seem to understand the meaning of a straight line. You know.....straight. This is no straight line (imitating a curved line).

(13) Whereas a straight line is only for individuals, a curved line is for people, many people, all the people. When people hang on the line, it becomes a curve. Thus when Tongans walk to Heaven in tribes, the road widens and curves to accommodate such a throng. Tongans curve into Heaven! Go Tongans! Go Heaven! Tongans go to Heaven! Why not? Put your arms together and your reach shall exceed your grasp or what's the Heaven for!

(14) Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends: In Tonga, the maximization of the Gospel or the communicating of the Good News achieves its best results when local people can relate meaningfully to both the medium and the message concomitantly. Hence, my vision of a post COVID-19 Pasifiki/World is our Communitarian God living with us in our Communitarian World.

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### **Pasifiki: Our Home and Diaspora Simultaneously**

Earth predawn murmurings,  
A cursor in the divine order of things,  
Lost for a moment in spiritual metamorphosis,  
As cover of night is easing off and folding.  
Breathtaking view of Iron Bottom Sound,  
Bruised by a motor canoe peeling across as a flying mullet,  
Beginning of human indignity scar-facing divine serenity;  
Nonetheless, *Kakai Motu* are as migratory as sea creatures.  
But *Ekklesia* here and now and onward *eschaton*,  
No to globalization as it yokes us to someone else's,

While democratization is post-modern colonial savagery;  
Ocean-level rising our death penalty undeserved.  
Rise up, O Pasifiki, and the whales take back our *Aqua Continent*.  
Pasifiki is simultaneously our home and *diaspora*, forever.

***About the Author***

Hon. Rev. Dr. Tevita Tonga Mohenoa Puloka is the Governor of Ha'apai. He has been for many years a regional and international prolific writer in Pacific theology and philosophy. He was the former Principal of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga's theological college, Sia'atoutai Theological College, a mentor and teacher to young church ministers in his Church, and the former President of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, based in Suva, Fiji. His professional services include: Clinical and Pastoral Counselling, General and Theological Education, Sacred Music and Drama, Church & Society, Writing Workshops.

# Our Knowledge as Resilience in Change

*Fetaomi Tapu-Qiliho*



The cessation of activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic was indeed extraordinary. The world came to a standstill as countries simultaneously underwent ‘lockdown’ in varying ways. Images on the television news of empty streets in New York, Rome and other great metropolitan centres were eerily discomfoting. Stories of panic buying associated with the frantic rush to prepare for times in isolation dominated the media. The steady increase in the numbers of those infected and dying the world over was scary. The closing of borders all over the world and the haste with which foreigners attempted to leave Samoa was also a strange phenomenon. As I tried to secure flights out of Samoa to the United States in March for American university students for whom I was responsible, I secretly longed for things to return to the way they were. It was easier. Everything was ‘normal’ then.

But what was our Old Normal? A Samoa where poverty was evident on the streets of Apia through the numerous children vendors peddling goods to make a living? Where a huge disinterest in subsistence farming and fishing and increased dependence on remittance monies were the norm? A Samoa wherein the instances of urbanisation and modernisation and a dislocation from traditional structures and values were becoming all too familiar? How did it come to be that our lives were defined by a consumerist culture emphasising wealth accumulation? How did the neoliberal agenda with its promise of ‘development’ become an ideal that we aspired to achieve?

COVID-19 halted the rhythm of life as we had come to know it. The nation of Samoa which had been polarised, yet was still comfortingly united through our insistence on the importance of the *fa'asāmoa*, ceased to buzz. The absence of church bells signalled an abrupt break to our cultural staple of church-going. Social gatherings were curbed, and economic activity ended. I wondered where the street vendors were and how those who had lost employment due to the economic downturn were getting by. Stories of hardship in the villages due to non-existent remittance monies surfaced.

Despite the State of Emergency regulations promulgated on March 20<sup>th</sup> that curtailed the freedoms we enjoyed in a more 'normal' Samoa, life has been peaceful and pleasant. There has been a return to values and practices of a pre-capitalist driven Samoa. Time in a relatively free 'lockdown' Samoa was an unanticipated yet welcomed moment of hiatus. Sunday church-going reinvented to focus on intimate family-led devotions has reinvigorated a practice of spiritual growth. Nation-wide fasting and praying became the norm. The decreased instances of remittances have seen an insistence on the need to return to subsistence farming and fishing. Traditional *fa'asāmoa* obligations during significant cultural events such as funerals were reduced to a simpler reciprocal exchange. Children who were seen regularly on the streets peddling goods were in their homes. In the face of social distancing, connections to *āiga* and the value of *alofa* have continued to encompass the Samoan person.

It has been with courage, hope and faith that the Samoan people have endured the changes brought about by COVID-19. Our collective resilience signals the importance of our indigenous ways of knowing and being as trajectories into the future.

### ***About the Author***

Dr. Fetaomi Tapu-Qiliho is an academic and lay person of the parish of All Saints Anglican Church, Apia.





Soul searching, looking deep within and finding your true self, true identity. Finding our value and knowing our worth and the value of all we are connected with.

**Painting by: Benjamin Dickson**

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# Reclaim our Distinctive and Pacific Identities

*Theresa Fox*



Slowly, over many generations, we have begun to disappear as unique Pacific Islanders. We are increasingly existing purely by name. Our form, our uniqueness is thoroughly altered – from the food we eat to the beverages we drink, the way we plant food or use land, and how we treat the Ocean, the rivers and streams, to the way we talk, walk and dream. We have sanctioned open access to the sacred spaces that our ancestors once held dear.

In Fiji, for instance, *tabua* (whale's teeth) are freely traded for cash and crooked dealings. Back in the day, when the *tabua* was used when asking for land, or a maiden's hand in marriage, it was returned to the one making the request if the request was rejected. The use of the *tabua* invokes a sacredness in the dialogue between the one requesting and the one receiving the request, a kind of indigenous spiritual contract that demands the highest standard of respect and honour. Today, it is becoming a common practice that those who offer the *tabua* do not return it even when they decline the request. Greed takes over. Lost are honour, respect and the sacredness of our engagements. It is no wonder that *tabua* are piled up in corners of pawn shops, pawned away for quick cash, hanging crudely inside display windows.

Our honour, our indigenous sacredness, which is emblematic of our Pacific identity, is for sale. Anything and everything is for sale. We've sold off parts of our forests that preserved our sacred spaces, our Ocean that harboured our totems, and our brothers and sisters, as we barter the common good on the altar of individual greed. Ultimately, we sold our pure Pacific identities for a

**“We need to reclaim our identity as Pacific indigenous peoples, an identity that is strongly embedded in respect and honour for everyone and all living things, and centred on life and not material things.”**

convoluted one, that is shifting, confused, ever-changing in the storms of many introduced identities, standing for nothing and falling for everything.

The COVID-19 pandemic jerked us awake. Suddenly, the systems that defined our adopted identity collapsed, failed and betrayed us. So we ran back to the land and seas, and found it new and exciting. The prominent theologian Dr Jenny Te Paa Daniel has said that for us to find it ‘new’ to return to the old ways of life shows how far we have gone off-track.

To get back on the path of light and enlightenment, to heal and rejuvenate, we need to find ourselves again. We need to reclaim our identity as Pacific indigenous peoples, an identity that is strongly embedded in respect and honour for everyone and all living things, and centred on life and not material things. It is an identity that exalts spirituality, mental and emotional wellbeing and the God of creation, who cares, is kind, loving, relational, and who created the intricate web of life, from the tiniest microbes to the largest trees, that is larger than just oneself. It is an identity that does not trade or barter itself away, that is proud to be itself, that has courage to promote itself, and that will stand tall, steadfast and strong, in the midst of any storm.

We can and must reclaim our identity. We can save ourselves. But first we need to want ourselves back. It is essential to our very existence as a group of people that we do. To know where we want to go, first we need to know and stand up for who we are! Otherwise we become a case of ‘too far gone to save!’

This is my vision. We reclaim who we are, in all areas of our interconnectedness of life – in agriculture, health, economic systems, education, social welfare, use of natural resources, in everything. It is not enough to just change a few things. It is essential that we reclaim everything, including all the values our ancestors stood for. We must not be known as just half a people, but as ‘people’ of the Pacific islands. Strong, tall, proud, courageous, steadfast in our beliefs, care and relationships, God-fearing, loving, and harmoniously living with nature – all for one, one for all. And it can start with the simplest things, like deciding not to sell our *tabua*.

***About the Author***

Theresa Fox is a Fijian journalist and communications professional who believes in a Pacific identity. She is passionate about environmental conservation and sustainable management as core to preserving the wellbeing of Pacific islanders. She lives the dream on her farm in Sawani, Naitasiri with her family.

# Embrace our Indigenous Knowledge in our New Story

*Maina Talia*



Arguably, what was seen as the Old Normal is now becoming a New Normal. For us in Tuvalu, the Old Normal was best understood by our people as a communal life of peace, love and prosperity. Peace, love and prosperity were measured by ‘happiness’ (*ola fiafia*) in the absence of a cash economy. We once lived in open houses with no rooms, no walls, and thus all of our problems were exposed. No wonder the rate of domestic violence was low or next to nothing. Sharing with our *tuakoi* (neighbour) was not only key, but indeed a core feature of our culture.

Commercial competition was totally absent. There was no race for individual success in the community; it was all about ‘us’ and ‘we,’ not about ‘me’ or ‘I.’ It was all communally grounded – *because of them, therefore we exist*. When communities were struck by existential catastrophes, we responded collectively and recovered as a community, utilising our *muna o te fale* (indigenous knowledge). There were no ‘rapid assessment’ or ‘post-disaster’ reports to determine financial support. The way forward was centred in the wisdom and the rationality of our elders. Our *tupuga* (ancestors) knew when to anticipate a cyclone and prepared themselves in advance.

Our Old Normal, in the eyes of the West, was comprehended as uncivilised, undeveloped and un-*palagi*/un-Western. Therefore, to become ‘normal’ was to enter into an unprecedented race for development and so-called ‘economic growth.’ We needed to be ‘developed’ to be ‘civilised’ and thereby to be ‘normal.’ The question now becomes: *What is the New Normal in the context of climate change, migration, sea-level rise and COVID-19?* Does it iterate a new way of responding to the swift

change of context, or is it just a demonstration that we have abandoned God in life? The ultimate search that could determine the New Normal is still our search for ‘happiness.’ The Old Normal sees material prosperity as being equal to a good life. It aims for unlimited growth and invents the GDP measure to quantify a good life. The exploitation of nature and natural resources is key in this pursuit. This is absurd. This is the Normal for the West that we have been gradually accepting.

The New Normal for us as Pacific Islanders must be to accept *our* Old Normal, our *muna o te fale* (indigenous knowledge), our culture and our way of living. We should not accept the ‘normal’ of the West as our ‘normal.’ The colonial and neocolonial definition of development is over. The era of being told what to do and how to do it by the West is over. There is no “one size fits all” when it comes to survival, and their ‘normal’ must not be our ‘normal.’ We must construct our New Normal based on our own priorities, our wisdom, and our unique context. If they want to cooperate, they need to accept our wisdom instead of continuing to impose their logic on us.

Our New Normal is our ability to stand strong and reconceptualise the appalling injustices and inequalities that created all these conditions that destroy the life-sustaining qualities of the earth. Our New Normal is our Old Normal!

### ***About the Author***

Maina Talia was born and raised in Vaitupu, Tuvalu. Because of his strong link to his community and his people, he continues to be the voice for his community and his beloved country on the issue of climate justice and indigenous issues, at the United Nations and at the regional level. Mr Talia was amongst the very few Pacific brothers and sisters who were highly involved in the UNFCCC Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, from its infancy to its adoption and its operationalisation. He is currently a PhD candidate at the Charles Sturt University in Australia, researching the issue of climate justice and *tuakoi* (neighbour) from three trajectories: *muna o te fale* (indigenous knowledge), biblical wisdom, and the geopolitics of climate change.

# Remember our Collective Welfare Culture

*L. K. M. T.*



Travel restrictions, physical distancing, isolation, state of emergency, lockdown and protective measures to slow down or prevent the outbreak of COVID-19 are slowly gaining footing as the new norms in Oceania. Where there are lockdowns, schools are empty, most offices are closed, and busy streets and business ventures are silenced. The transition to minimal social interaction could have easily inspired ruptures in relations. But that is not the normative COVID-19 response that Oceania is weaving. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

In Oceania, the smallest unit is not an individual but a family. In this trying time, Oceania has translated that very notion into a form of insurance: the interconnection and unity of family are integrated into the fight against COVID-19. The coronavirus is infectious but it has brought with it the realisation that compassion is also infectious. Although, in medical terms, we are at our safest when we are apart, we know as Pacific Islanders that, in times of crisis, we look out for our neighbours, the most vulnerable in our communities, and we come through for them.

Today, we are more together and interconnected than ever before, and our communal bonds are strengthened. We have made this fight a collective fight as our Oceanic warmth, love and compassion prompt us to stand united and to go further for each other. The brave frontline workers and volunteers are risking their safety and sacrificing the comfort and security of their homes and families in order to save lives.

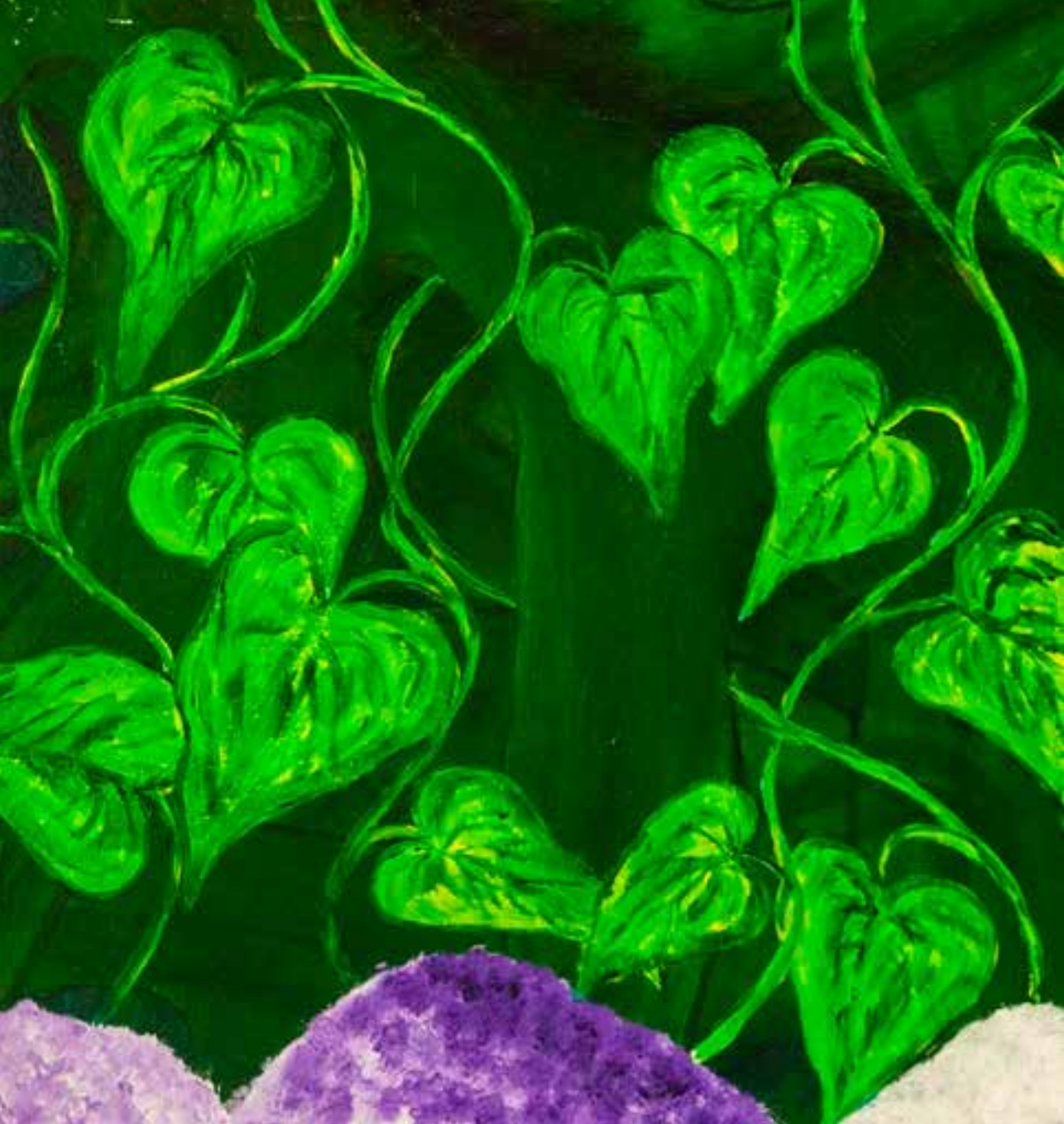
Beyond the walls of hospitals and quarantine facilities, people have offered their help to hospitals, affected families and the most vulnerable. Home-sewn masks, toiletry packages and groceries are delivered to the indigents and elderly. Leaders and governments are responding to the health and safety needs of their people, and global institutions are coming to the aid of developing economies, including the Pacific island states. It is clear that this pandemic has come with the lesson and reminder that interconnection is necessary, especially in the face of unprecedented challenges.

This realisation has compelled Oceania to shift from individualistic to collective welfare. Aid and other efforts are now transcending races, status and age. I believe that this is a reminder, a lesson, that will prevail in post-COVID-19 times. When this crisis blows over, the Pacific people will remember and will continue to strengthen their collective welfare culture and unity, and be on the lookout for each other. After all, Oceania has always known this – it takes a village to nurture a child.

***About the Author***

L. K. M. T. is a 23-year-old civil servant from Tonga, and a Tonga Youth Leaders Ambassador.





## “Kwateya”

I come from a society where we belong to our mother’s clan. My maternal grandmother comes from an island which prides itself in yams. Everyone born and from our island Duau is given a yam name and plants that name apart from others. My maternal grandmother is named after the highest most celebrated feast yam. Rosa Koians article rekindled memories and inspired this painting...the inside colour of the yams. The inner soul of man...and the yam leaves and shoots rising like prayers and hope...birth and re- growth.

**Painting by: Benjamin Dickson**

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# The Prayer in a Yam Year in Yam Cultures of Papua New Guinea

*Rosa Koian*



Yam cultures of Papua New Guinea were sophisticated and, while many have felt the slap of colonisation, some continue to exist in parts of the country today. People have organised and made things happen for their communities and their society. They have built community from the ground up.

Yams were historically symbols of wealth and had significant cultural and spiritual lessons for many. In the whole ecosystem of the yam culture, prayer, silence, respect and education were integral. Silence was the opportunity to learn from a higher source. Prayer was the reminder that there were other beings in this ecosystem that helped to sustain humans and must be acknowledged. This worldview came from the belief that “I exist because they exist.” Respect gave every individual his or her boundaries. Boundaries were not physical but the respect of knowing when one should submit to the next person or knowledge holder. Learning promised this society a future. The elders understood that they were here only for a while, and their children must continue in a system that promised a better future. It was a responsibility the elders took seriously, and they made sure that every child learned and mastered the various arts of living. This is a brief description of what these communities valued and how they organised themselves.

### **The Calendar – Planting and Harvesting**

In yam communities, the year ended with the harvest, which in the Gregorian calendar we follow today is between March and April. This was when communities celebrated boys transitioning to manhood, when children born during the period were welcomed into their clans and community, newly built houses were opened, new canoes launched their journeys into the sea, and many other events occurred.

The planting period for the lesser yam started in May, and for the greater yam towards the end of June and into mid-July, when the rains would make a short visit, just enough to water the seeds. This was the beginning of their calendar (Koian 2002). The lesser yam was (and is) used for food, and the greater yam is the ceremonial yam that required careful handling from seed bank to ground to harvesting ceremony and back to seed bank. Between the planting and the harvesting there was a nine-month period. There was no rest but work continued diligently.

In the Bel villages of Madang the appearance of *bazas* (the local name for the brightest star constellation, Taurus) signaled the beginning of the planting season (Hannermann 1996), but villagers would wait for two or three days, and when the tide covered the reef they would all get up very early in the morning and start planting the yam seeds. The planting period must end before the tide went down. This usually took about a week.

In the period after the planting, usually nine months, this was the time the communities built new houses, made new canoes, mended fishing nets and traps, made a second garden for other food crops, made mats and baskets or ornaments for trade and, to sustain their daily needs, went fishing, hunting and gathering food from the wild. Throughout the year, different fruits, fish, edible plants and animals presented themselves for a short period so that humans had all their food needs met in the year.

In the whole cycle, spirituality and education transcended every aspect of the people's daily lives. Before they cleared the land they prayed and asked the guardian spirits' permission to do their gardening. They prayed before they put the seeds in the ground and prayed again for the rains to water the seeds they had just planted. In this act they acknowledged everyone who would act in order to achieve a good harvest.

People prayed before they started every new activity, whether it was a house, a canoe, a hunting trip or a fishing trip, and when harvest time came they prayed again to thank the spirits. The harvest was often plentiful and farmers knew it did not come from their hands alone – the soil, the wind and air, the rain and sun and the good spirits had all done their part. A significant foundation of this cycle was the seed bank. Every yam community had yam houses which were exquisitely built and ornamented. These houses held the seeds until the next planting season.

In responding to the question of whether Melanesians were traditionally religious or not, Theo Aerts, a Catholic priest in Papua New Guinea, has noted that there were many religious models at hand (1996). He made a collection of some of these indigenous prayers and submitted them to the University of Papua New Guinea archives as a lasting legacy.

### **Education and Learning**

In order to sustain a clan or a village, education was paramount. Children learned at the earliest age how to do many things, and in all of these learning activities they prayed. Prayer was not in the form of the modern-day tradition of sitting apart; it occurred during every activity, in the moment. Many of these prayer moments took place with the yam seeds, in the river, on the reefs, by the fire, by a tree, or where people came to a place where they acknowledged they needed help and trusted others to take the work from there. It was a space of the unspoken. People trusted that the good guardian spirits would give them good harvests, good catches, and many years of sustenance.

Sometimes the harvest or the catch was poor. Then people would sit down and assess what they had not done right. Perhaps a woman or a man had broken a ritual, or children had played or screamed at the wrong time. This was a matter for the chiefs to deliberate on and issue orders instantly, or remind people of the standing orders which the young men and women received during their initiation period, or which children had received during their story times. Children learned to respect these guidelines, and they grew in the arts of the yam culture that set their journey toward a sustainable livelihood. They listened to the sayings from their mothers, grandmothers, uncles and fathers. In the evenings they would lie at the feet of the storytellers and listen to stories of their ancestors and how they came to their village. In these stories they learned about bravery, preservation, respect, and many related values.

In some cultures, a specialist elder would select certain children and train them in every aspect of a particular trade. For instance, seafaring demanded a special kind of person, canoe makers demanded a different set of skills, and healers needed to pass their knowledge on to those they trusted. The learning was from eye to mind, and the brain must be trained to hold this information for the rest of their lives.

### **The Harvest**

Each yam society had a higher purpose. Each one wanted to be better than other groups, and if they did not have the skill they would source it. The more people they trained in specific skills, the more secure their communities would be, yet they knew their future ultimately rested with the spirits of their surroundings.

At harvest the first yams were offered to those who had worked with them. There were thanksgiving ceremonies. These were big ceremonies, with yams painted and dressed, towers built, and yams displayed in elevated places. The killing of pigs was the people's offering to the spirits of the air, rain and soil who had helped them achieve the harvest. A lot of singing and dancing in colorful elaborate attire marked the end of the year, and in two or three weeks they started the beginning of the new yam year with the planting.

The grading of the yams followed the thanksgiving. The best producers and those who produced the most were recognised and celebrated. Those who produced less were challenged to do better the following year. The principle of sharing carried on so that no one was hungry. This was the time when the people evaluated their productivity and their commitment to being the best producer of yams in their society. This was also the time when they counted the quantities they had harvested for trade and started preparing for trade expeditions.

### **Conclusion**

The yam societies of Papua New Guinea were highly developed. Throughout the whole ecosystem these people's spirituality was central, and fostered peace and respect for humans and every living being around them. In understanding why prayer was not a foreign idea for many when the first missionaries came, Theo Aerts has concurred that these were religious people long before the missionaries arrived and introduced Christianity. Their connectedness to the spiritual world gave them invaluable abilities, such as the ability to read the weather patterns and to act swiftly before they changed. Such abilities gave them the confidence to co-exist with the created world with a sense of purpose.

These yam cultures were not just about food. People organised themselves well so that they protected and cared for themselves and their communities while moving towards a greater goal. Working together with others, nature and the spirits, a society was built, and today these societies are still here. They have much wisdom to offer as our Pacific peoples enter into an uncertain future.

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### ***About the Author***

Rosa Koian is a Papua New Guinean journalist and community development practitioner. As well as her writing, she has spent many years advocating for indigenous-led development and the protection of the environment. Grounded in her mother's teachings and her father's humble culture, she raises indigenous voices in the belief that there is a future for those who dwell on the land (sea and air included).

# Weaving to Learn and Learning to Weave

*'Anaseini T. Ulakai*



“Valovalo ke lālanga, lālanga ke fēangai – ko e lālanga ‘o ha kaha’u falala’anga:  
We are weaving a propitious future for cohesive, resilient and sustainable  
communities and regions of tomorrow.”

*Lālanga* or weaving is the essence of a *falehanga* or home, the basic unit of any social organisation in Tonga, throughout the Pacific region, and beyond. The fine woven mats, known as a *falá* or ‘*aofi*, are products of the *lālanga* process. These mats have significant value in presentations and exchanges of gifts in occasions such as weddings, birthdays and funerals. Some mats, commonly known as *ta’ovala* or ‘*aofivala* (dressing mats), are used to wrap the nation’s centuries’ old traditions around one’s waist. Some are heirlooms passed down through generations within families. These are known to bring good fortune and wealth. Some represent one’s connection to a particular genealogy. The most common are the mats wrapped around the waist to signify one’s cultural and social status in a community. These days we tend to *haka he langi kuo tau* (dance in the ecstasy of pride) when wearing and giving away these fine mats.

However, today we lack the knowledge and appreciation of those who weave them, and how these are woven. This is akin to how we, in this generation, lack an appreciation for how our leaders in the past wove the developments that gave us the autonomy to advance and develop to this day. There are also those who have forgotten their roots, and are drowning in the waves of Westernisation. They have become foreign to what was once their *pae* (traditional fine mat and *tapa* offered on the occasion of the birth of a child).

My vision is that we unite as Pacific people and nurture great leaders as weavers. These leaders will not just offer our nations mere Band-Aid solutions, but will cultivate a culture imbued with our Pasifika values, values that will ground our visions of unity and solidarity as a region. This will strengthen our culture so that we can overturn the brain drain and gather both the *kau tae'iloa* (the unfamiliar) and *tu'ukimu'a*



(the clever) to weave strategic industries to boost our gross domestic product and create incomes. This will be a culture that will connect the mightier *fonuá* (land) and the weak to build a *fala* that will gather the '*otu motú* (Islands of the Pacific) to share resilience in the face of the destructive impacts of climate change's *matangi* (storms).

However, in order to weave one must be conscious of the four main processes of the *lālanga*. Before the *lālanga*, the weaver starts by gathering the pandanus leaves or *lo'akau*. There are four varieties of pandanus leaves: *pāongo* (brown); *tofua* (light brown); *kie* (white); and *tapahina* (white stripes). These leaves represent our vastness, diverse languages, cultures and degrees of socio-economic development in our region.

Before we select a weaver (a leader) to *lālanga* cohesion, resilience and sustainability, we need to ensure that the next generation of weavers is equipped with and can epitomise certain qualities expected of a true weaver. These are qualities such as determination, patience and commitment, which make it possible to *lālanga ha kaha'u falala'anga* – weave a hopeful future. These weavers must weave the mat we aspire, and they must have the patience to endure and the commitment to weave the mat with all its patterns.

Firstly, the leaves are boiled to get rid of the outer layer. In other words, the weaver must ensure that she or he deals constructively with our differences. The leaves are then secured to a rope and firmly submerged in the sea to soak for days. The leaves represent our nations, exposed to the inequalities of this unprecedented time. We are constantly exposed to the destructive impacts of climate change, such as the erosion of coastal areas due to sea level rise, increased severity and frequency of tropical cyclones, and increased density of rainfall resulting in severe flooding. The process of soaking in seawater allows the leaves to become more bleached and soft for weaving. After that, the leaves

are removed from the seawater, rinsed in fresh water, and dried for days in the sun. Figuratively, this part of the weaving process represents our exposure to the reality of climate change impacts, corrupt leadership, and our debt-ridden and remittances-based economies.

We need to groom leaders not just for tomorrow, but for future generations. Because the *lālanga* is largely a community activity, it enables the maintenance of certain values. Unlike what is occurring today, communication in a *lālanga* is done face-to-face. This strengthens the relationship bonds between families and others, promotes harmony through working together, and enhances sharing of basic necessities among families. *Lālanga* teaches one to persevere through the different stages of preparing and weaving: scraping the leaves; submerging them in sea water; bleaching and drying them out; the actual weaving of the mat; and ornamenting the woven mat.

During this complex process, other disciplines are also practiced. It is vital to preserve these practices for the benefit of the generations to come. We must ensure that we are guiding and strengthening the emerging cohort of weavers, giving them a sense of belonging and appreciation so that they may continue to *lālanga* and, most importantly, preserve quality and enhance durability. When the *falá* is finished, we ornament it. The whole process requires very little financing. The lesson is that we should not always rely on money to operate. We must innovate and cultivate, and punch above our weight if we are to withstand more and worse natural disasters in years to come, because we have woven a system that will sustain us, not just for today but also for tomorrow.

*Dear weaver, and weavers of tomorrow, while you are weaving cohesion, resilience and sustainability, consider that what you are weaving is a legacy that will become an heirloom, passing on good fortune and the wealth of hope, so that tomorrow's weavers can continue the LĀLANGA.*

***About the Author***

‘Anaseini T. Ulakai is 21 years of age, born and raised in Nuku’alofa, Tongatapu, Tonga. She previously earned a Bachelor’s degree in Politics and International Relations and a Bachelor’s degree in Law at Auckland University. She has worked in the Supreme Court of Tonga, under the administration office of the Chief Registrar. She is a Tonga National Youth Parliament alumnus (2018) and a member of the Australian Girls Takeover Parliament, an initiative of Jasiri Australia. She is also a national and regional Youth Advocate and Champion for the International Conference on Population and Development under the UNFPA Pacific sub-regional office, and an active member of the Regional Youth of the Pacific’s SRHR Alliance. She also works as a United Nations Youth Advocate for SRHR and Climate Action, while currently undertaking further studies at the Australian National University.

# Hathat Se Puku ka Hå'hå' se Pupu – Envisioning a Multi-tasking Oceania

*Wilfer Afrete Rigamoto*



My vision for Oceania is for individuals to play a pivotal role in creating a community of change agents who will act together to address the complex and immense challenges ahead. This vision is drawn from the Rotuman aphorism *hathat se puku ka hå'hå' se pupu*, which literally means “read books but pull the weeds.” It implies and reminds us of our holistic, multi-tasking worldview. It has four aspects.

- First, it is about *fuagri'akiga* (anchoring). This aspect embraces our connectivity to our land, God and people. When we are profoundly anchored in our culture and traditions, we will tend to value and embrace who we are and who we would like to become. As islanders, whether we are adults, youths or children, it is very important that we value the significance of our culture and traditions, while at the same time opening ourselves and adapting to new changes.
- Second, it is about *a'vavai'ak* (flexibility). While embracing our culture and traditions, we allow ourselves to be open to new changes, to adapt and accept.
- Third, it is about *faiva* (practicality). This aspect encourages islanders to live a balanced life, such as educating ourselves thoroughly (in both theory and practice), adopting and living a multi-tasking life.

- Fourth, it is about *ososia* (futuristic preparation). This aspect prepares us for both good and challenging times ahead of us. As islanders, challenges are normal because preparation is an everyday task. It prepares us not only for the present but for the future as well. In other words, when the future comes with challenges, we do not fear because we are well prepared.

To conclude, let us not just make a change; let us “Be the Change and Be Changed.”

***About the Author***

Wilfer Afrete Rigamoto hails from the beautiful island of Rotuma. He is currently a student at the University of the South Pacific. He loves socialising and is passionate about getting people together and challenging young people regarding what lies ahead of them and what the future holds.

# Taha he Kehe – Unity in Diversity: Towards A New Moana Oceania

*Hūfanga He Ako Moe Lotu ‘Ōkusitino Māhina*



*L-R: Hūfanga He Ako Moe Lotu Professor ‘Ōkusitino Māhina, the late Professor Epeli Hau‘ofa, and Professor Randy Thaman (USP, Suva, Pulotu/Fiji, 1988)*

## Tukupā/Dedication

This essay is dedicated with *‘ofa mo ‘oni* (true love) and *manatu vivili* (undying remembrance) to my dear esteemed friend, colleague and teacher, Epeli Hau‘ofa, who has passed on from life to legend, and whose everlasting soul, now in the deep past yet in front of us, lingers on to the distant future in the back, guided by refined past knowledge, both taking place in the ever-changing, conflicting present.

*Kuila e Lomipeau  
Kuo taha ai ‘ae ua  
‘Hala kuo Papa’*

In the flagship of *Lomipeau*  
The two has become one <sup>1</sup>  
‘Well-Trodden Path’ composed by Queen Sālote  
and performed by Lomipeau Choral Musical

*Tohitapu ‘oku lea ‘o pehē  
Koe ikuna he ‘etau taha pē*

The Bible says in total  
Success is one in all<sup>2</sup>

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1 By way of *heliaki*, the ‘metaphorically saying one thing but really meaning another’ reference is made to the two kingly lines, viz., Tu‘i Tonga and Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua, now combined in the third, Tu‘i Kanokupolu, in the personhoods of her royal children. The poetic metaphorical equation is  $1 + 1 = 2 = 1$ , in contrast to the real, mathematical equation,  $1 + 1 = 2$ .

2 As a *heliaki*, it refers to a diversity of people working together under a unity of ideas and feelings

‘*Molumalu*’

‘Solemnity-Sanctity’ composed by Siope Puli  
and performed by Fola‘osi Choral Musical

### Talakamata/**Introduction**

The COVID-19<sup>3</sup> pandemic has brought the whole world to its knees, subjecting all forms of social activity to a relative standstill and culminating in the huge loss of lives across the globe, irrespective of geographical, intellectual, social, religious, political and economic boundaries. As a matter of both immediacy and urgency, a collective response has accordingly been heeded as an SOS call, in the face of the adversity of the current COVID-19 global pandemic, where a diversity of things is constantly mediated<sup>4</sup> into a unity based on their *modus operandi* in reality, as in nature, mind and society. This entails, by means of both constancy and consistency, a transformation<sup>5</sup> of the current human-environment<sup>6</sup> *felekeu*<sup>7</sup> crisis into a state of *maau*<sup>8</sup> (stasis), through sustained *tatau* (symmetry), *potupotutatau* (harmony) and *faka‘ofa‘ofa*<sup>9</sup> (beauty).

### Taha he Kehe (**Unity in Diversity**), Kehe he Taha (**Diversity in Unity**)

This humble effort is an attempt to offer, by way of both conception and action, both a specific and general Moana Oceania<sup>10</sup> view of a new post-COVID-19 Moana Oceania, on both the regional and global levels. I will situate my subject matter of exploration as a text, viz., ‘*Taha he Kehe* Unity in Diversity: A New Post-COVID-19 Moana Oceania,’ in the broader context of the *fakahoko* (connection) and *fakamāvae* (separation), i.e., the *fakafelavai* (intersection) of *Tāvāism* and *Hoaism/Soaism*,<sup>11</sup> as pan-Moana Oceania *tāvāist* philosophical

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for a common purpose; the same applies to the whole spectrum of reality, be this nature, mind or society, including events such as COVID-19 and climate change, and institutions such as church and government.

3 Or coronavirus (or crownvirus) disease, 2019.

4 That is, *fakataatau* mediation.

5 Or *liliu* transformation, in Tongan.

6 The *hoa/soa*-led human-environment crisis is both about the connection and separation (or intersection) of people and environment, defined as fonua, i.e., ‘person’ and ‘place,’ ‘time’ and ‘space,’ and not just an environmental crisis only in terms of separation in isolation from both connection and people.

7 Or *sepaki* crisis, a hectic life or chaos.

8 Or *fenāpasi* stasis, static or order.

9 Or *mālie*, beauty, its older form.

10 Both Moana and Oceania are compatible as a translation, in stark contrast to Pacific, which was enforced and imposed on Moana.

11 Or *soa* in Samoan; cf. *tāvāist* hoaism as opposed to philosophical dualism and anthropological binarism.

concepts and practices. The idiom *'taha he kehe'* (unity in diversity) holds true, as does its converse, *'kehe he taha'* (diversity in unity), both as inseparable but indispensable *hoa/soa* pairs of equal and opposite binaries, as in *taau e lei moe tofua 'a*<sup>12</sup> (the lei tooth befits the whale) or, conversely, *taau e tofua 'a moe lei* (the whale befits the lei tooth).<sup>13</sup>

Kuongamu'a/Kuohili, Kuongaloto/Lotolotonga, and Kuongamui/Kaha'u: **(Past, Present, and Future)**

As 'indigenous'<sup>14</sup> Tongan (and Moana Oceania) *tāvāist* philosophical concepts and practices, *Tāvāism* and *Hoaism/Soaism* will be critiqued in terms of both the metaphorical and historical dimensions of the past, present and future. Metaphorically, in Tonga, the past, present and future are respectively known as *kuongamu'a* ('age-in-the-front'), *kuongaloto* ('age-in-the-middle') and *kuongamui* ('age-in-the-back'). Historically, they are called *kuohili* ('that-which-has-passed'), *lotolotonga* ('that-which-is-now') and *kaha'u* ('that-which-is-yet-to-come')<sup>15</sup> respectively. Put simply, this means that the illusive already-taken-place past, which has stood the test of time-space, is put in the front as guidance; and the elusive yet-to-take-place future is placed in the back, guided by refined past experiences; both are constantly mediated in the ever-changing, conflicting present.<sup>16</sup>

**Tāvāism Ta-Vā (Time-Space Philosophy of Reality)**

*Tāvāism*, as a general philosophy of reality, is based in the indigenous concepts and practices *tā* and *vā*,<sup>17</sup> approximately translated into English as 'time' and 'space.' Its tenets are as follows: that *tā* and *vā*<sup>18</sup> as ontological entities are the

12 As a Tongan *lea heliaki* proverbial saying.

13 Or *tabua* in Pulotu, Fijian.

14 The universal term 'indigenous' is especially used here to denote the best and permanence in all human endeavours, i.e., the things that last over *tā* and *vā* (time and space), as in the Tongan terms *tala-e-fonua*, *tala-tukufakaholo-e-fonua*, and *tala-taufatungamotu'a-e-fonua*, in view of the possible evolutionary distinction over 'indigeneity' and 'authenticity' between the Rest and the West respectively.

15 Or *kuohoko* ('that-which-has-happened'), *hoko* ('that-which-is-happening') and *kahoko* ('that-which-is-yet-to-happen').

16 As *tā-vā* (time-space), travellers of the Great Moana Levu, Lahi, Tele and Nui did travel forward into the deep past and backward into the distant future, both in the constantly shifting present.

17 Or *kā* and *wā* (Moana *hahake*, eastern Moana), and *trag* and *wan* (Austronesia), both meaning 'time' and 'space.'

18 As indivisible though inevitable *hoa/soa* or pairs of equal and opposite binaries, *tā* and *vā* (time and space) are the abstract dimensions of *fuo* and *uho* (form and content), which are, in turn, the concrete manifestations of *tā* and *vā* (time and space). Moreover, *tā* and *fuo* (time and form) are verbs (action-led) and definers of *vā* and *uho* (space and content), which are, in turn, nouns (object-based) and composers of *tā* and *fuo* (time and form).

common medium in which all things exist; that *tā* and *vā*<sup>19</sup> as epistemological identities are socially organised in different ways across cultures; that all things in reality stand in eternal relations of exchange, giving rise to *maau* (order) and *felekeu* (conflict); that as a corollary, everywhere in reality is *fakafelavai* (intersection), and there is nothing over *fakahoko* (connection) and *fakamāvae* (separation); that as a corollary, everywhere in reality is *mata-ava* (eye-hole),<sup>20</sup> and that as a corollary *everywhere in reality is hoa/soa, and there is nothing beyond hoamālie/hoatatau equal and hoatamaki/hoakehekehe* opposite pairs or binaries.

The major dispute between *Tāvāism* (as well as Realism)<sup>21</sup> and Idealism<sup>22</sup> over ontology (ways of being) and epistemology (ways of knowing) is between ‘reality as it is’ and ‘reality as we know it.’ The fundamental issue is not ‘how we know what we know,’ or ‘where we know what we know,’ or ‘when we know what we know,’ or ‘why we know what we know,’ but rather ‘what we really know.’<sup>23</sup> Our *Moana* Oceania forebears embraced both ontology and epistemology, i.e., the ‘ways of reality and nature’ and the ‘ways of society and people’ upon which all types of disciplinary practices and forms of social activity were modeled in both the productive and reproductive process.<sup>24</sup> This is seen, for example, in the human-made performance art of *toutaivaka* (navigation),<sup>25</sup>

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19 By virtue of their being inseparable but indispensable, *hoa/soa* as pairs of equal and opposite binaries *tā* and *vā* (time and space), like *fuo* and *uho*, are four-dimensional – i.e., *fuo* (form), *mā’olunga/loloto* (height/depth), *lōloa* (length) and *maokupu/fālahi* (breadth/width), and not three-dimensional (all three spatial entities minus *fuo* form the temporal entity), i.e., *ta’eta* (timeless) and *ta’efuo* (formless).

20 As in *mata-matangi* (‘eye-of-the-wind’) and *ava-matangi* (‘hole-of-the-wind’), *mata’i-fa’o* (‘eye-of-the-nail’), *ava’i-fa’o* (‘hole-of-the-nail’), *mata’i-hui* (‘eye-of-the-needle’) and *ava’i-hui* (‘hole-of-the-needle’), all are inseparable but indispensable equal and opposite *hoa*.

21 *Tāvāism* and Realism as brands of philosophy share much in common, where the former is rooted in *tā* and *vā*, i.e., reality, while the latter is grounded in reality, i.e., time and space (i.e., temporalism-spatialism).

22 Whereas Idealism is mind-dependent in character, both *Tāvāism* and Realism are reality-reliant in nature.

23 It follows that the ontological questions are primary over the epistemological questions.

24 These are the grand stories of God’s *fakatupe* (creation) of the *maama* (earth) and the Moana Oceania islands, where God caused through the power of words the *fuofuonoa* and *lala* (‘timeless’ and ‘formless’) earth to come into being, as in the *hoa/soa* of darkness-light, land-sea, sun-moon, flora-fauna, and man-woman, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the islands emerging out of the *moana*, as in Tonga, which began with Pulotu-Vahanoa/Moana through the ‘Age of Gods’ to the ‘Age of Men’ to the ‘Age of Kings.’ Pulotu is the ancestral homeland and afterworld of *Maama* (Earth) and *Langi* (Sky), with Pulotu, Maama and Langi as the respective symbolic names of Fiji, Tonga, and Sāmoa.

25 Or *faiva faifolau* (performance art of voyaging).

where the nature-given entities of *matangi* (winds) and *peau*<sup>26</sup> (waves) were used in the creative process.<sup>27</sup>

### Hoatism/Soatism **Pairs of Inseparable but Indispensable Equal and Opposite Binaries**

*Hoatism/Soatism* is deeply embedded in the indigenous Tongan (and Moana Oceania) concept and practice of *hoa/soa* as indivisible yet indispensable pairs of *hoamālie*<sup>28</sup> (equal) and *hoatamaki*<sup>29</sup> (opposite) binaries. Generally, this is most evident in the *tu'unga faingatāmaki* ('state of emergency') and *tu'ungafaingamālie* ('state of normality') over conditions of *nofo fakataautaha*<sup>30</sup> ('physical-social isolation-exclusion') and *nofo fakatahataha*<sup>31</sup> ('physical-social connection-inclusion').<sup>7</sup> In order to move toward a consistent shift in the COVID-19 event, in view of reducing both the rate and size of infection, and more importantly the eradication of COVID-19 through scientific inquiry and research, there has been a concerted effort, politically issued, for a constant albeit coherent mediation of both entwined and intertwined states of affairs, thereby transforming them, through sustained symmetry, harmony and beauty, from crisis to stasis.

### Kepitalisi (**capitalism**) and temokalati (**democracy**)

The *tu'unga faingatāmaki* ('state of emergency') which was brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic led to a prolonged period of lockdown, which in turn gave way to a condition of *nofo fakataautaha* ('physical-social isolation-exclusion'). Consequently, this impacted both the global economy and global society, within and across all contexts and on all levels, especially given the desire to return to a *tu'unga faingamālie* ('state of normality') and *nofo fakatahataha* ('physical-social connection-inclusion'). What became clear was that we could only have one or the other, but not both. In order for all of us to have the best of both worlds, viz., the global economy and global society generally, and capitalist democracy and social existence specifically, a consistent symmetrical, harmonious and beautiful shift is required, from chaos to order.

26 Or *ngalu* wave, its older form.

27 As in the use of the nature-given entities of *ongo* (sound), *'akau* (wood) and *hiapo* (mulberry plants) in the performance, material and fine arts of *faiva hiva* (music), *tufunga fo 'uvaka* (boat-building), and *nimamea 'a koka 'anga* (bark cloth-making), as both human-made disciplinary and social practices.

28 Or *hoatatau* (equal pairs, binary).

29 Or *hoakehekehe* (opposite pair, binary).

30 Or *fakamovetevete* ('isolation-exclusion').

31 Or *fakatokolahi* ('connection-exclusion').

### Fonua (person and place, time and space)

The concept and practice of *fonua*, like *Hoatism/Soatism*, is deeply entrenched in *Tāvāism*. Moreover, it can offer an effective critique of the problematics underpinning capitalist democracy, sustainable development and the current human-environment crises, notably climate change and COVID-19.<sup>32</sup> As a pan-Moana Oceania *hoa/soa*, *fonua* variously exists throughout the region as: *hanua*, *honua*, *vanua*, *fanua*, *fenua*, and *whenua*, defined by ‘person’ and ‘place’ (i.e., ‘time’ and ‘space’) as *hoa/soa*, with the former as a temporal-definer and the latter as a spatial-composer. There are three *fonua*: namely, the *valevale* (fetus) and *fa’ē* (mother’s placenta); *kakai* (people) and *‘ātakai* (environment); and the *mate* (dead) and *fonualoto* (burial place), all demarcated by a diversified yet unified movement from *fā’ele* (birth), through *mo’ui* (life), to *mate* (death), in plural, temporal-spatial, collectivistic, holistic and circular ways.<sup>33</sup>

As a pan-Moana human-environment, *hoa/soa* pairs or binaries, *fonua* (or *hanua*, *honua*, *vanua*, *fanua*, *fenua* and *whenua*) can be used as a meaningfully rigorous critique of the highly problematic Western-led, UN-driven doctrine of sustainable development,<sup>34</sup> which privileges people over the environment, when, in reality, people form but a minute part of the environment. The same separatist tendency is extended to both post-WWII Western-led, UN-based economic development<sup>35</sup> and post-Cold War Western-based, UN-generated political governance;<sup>36</sup> where both, as *hoa/soa*-led capitalist and democratic agendas, are addressed in relative isolation and in strict exclusion from local cultures. From a *tāvāist* perspective, however, all are indivisible but inevitable *hoa/soa* of equal and opposite binaries, symmetrically mediated and transformed from the hectic to the static.

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32 COVID-19, like the impending climate change crisis, is at best a human-environment crisis.

33 As opposed to the Western singular, techno-teleological, individualistic, atomistic and linear ways.

34 The undue over-emphasised preoccupation of sustainable development with meeting the needs of both the present and future generations leaves the intersection or connection and separation between people and the environment unaccounted for, in both their indivisibility yet indispensability as *hoa/soa* (pairs or binaries).

35 Similarly, economic development, which is essentially a capitalist agenda, is *fakakonga* (‘partial’) rather than *fakakātoa* (‘total’), in both its general and particular approaches, especially when it does not take culture seriously.

36 As a democratic ideology, political governance is popularly known as *pule lelei* (‘good governance’) and *taki lelei* (‘good leadership’), presumably as opposed to *pule kovi* (‘bad governance’) and *taki kovi* (‘bad leadership’), evolutionarily developed along singular, techno-teleological, individualistic, atomistic and linear modes in strict isolation from local settled and refined values and mores.

### Tauhivā (Keeping Sociospatial Relations) and Faifatongia (Performing Socioeconomic Functions)

Tongan *tauhiivā* ('keeping socio-spatial relations') and *faifatongia* ('performing socio-economic functions'), like Samoan *teulevā* ('decorating socio-spatial relations') and *tautua* ('enacting socio-economic services'), are Tongan and Samoan political and economic systems. Both are inseparably conducted together as *hoa/soa* of equal and opposite binaries in the social process. As indivisible yet unavoidable *hoa/soa*, *faifatongia/tautua* temporally defines *tauhiivā/teulevā*, which in turn spatially composes *faifatongia/tautua*. Depending on the balance or imbalance of their mediation, both process and outcome can be either *vālelei* (good relations), i.e., *melino* (peace/stability), *tu'umālie* (prosperity), and *tau'atāina* (autonomy); or *vākovi* (bad relations), i.e., *vātau/vālau* (conflict/instability), *tu'utāmaki* (poverty), and *pōpula* (tyranny).

**“This human-environment crisis necessarily calls for knowledge in place of ignorance. The latter breeds fear, hate, conflict, war, killing and death, all leading to self-destruction of our planet Earth, our collective habitat.”**

**Ako (education), 'ilo (knowledge) and potō (skill)**

The Tongan *tāvāist* philosophy of *ako* (education) can be defined as: a temporal-formal, spatial-substantial, and functional-practical transformation of *'atamai* (mind) and *fakakaukau* (thinking) in the *'uto* (brain), *ongo* (feeling) and *loto* (desiring), and in the *fatu*<sup>37</sup> (heart), from *vale* (ignorance) to *'ilo* (knowledge) to *potō* (skill), in that logical order of precedence.<sup>38</sup> From a *tāvāist* view, knowledge is knowledge of *tā* and *vā*, time and space; and errors in thinking and feeling are a problem of mind and heart, but not of

reality. The knowledge acquired in education is dialectically constituted or composed in *fonua*<sup>39</sup> (culture), and historically transmitted or communicated

37 Or *mafu*, its older form.

38 Sadly, though, the kind of (colonial and postcolonial) Western-led education has for so long been politically-economically enforced and imposed on Moana Oceania, where technical-vocational training is made to precede classical-critical education when, in reality, both are inseparable yet indispensable *hoa/soa*, with the latter taking the lead over the former, in that logical order of precedence. This type of education, undermining Moana Ocean education as its pair or binary, has been slowly but surely responsible for the speedy erosion of Moana Oceania knowledge, composed in culture and communicated in language, which means, in the final analysis, the total loss of all three.

39 Or *kalatua*, a Tongan transliteration of culture, *fonua*.

in *tala*<sup>40</sup> (language), both as *vaka*<sup>41</sup> (vessels),<sup>42</sup> with all three as temporal-spatial entities taking place in both time and space; both are the common medium in which all things exist in reality, as in nature, mind and society.

As ontological entities, time and space, like culture and language, are organised epistemologically in different ways across societies. While the social organisation of education differs across societies, its intellectual process is commonly concerned with the acquisition of knowledge of things as they really are. Knowledge is knowledge of reality, i.e., time-space, either ‘indigenous’ knowledge or scientific knowledge, variously acquired by observation, experimentation and verification through trial and error. The acquisition of both forms of knowledge is differentiated by varying rates and durations, where the former is elongated, e.g., the ocean for both fishing and voyaging, and the latter highly contracted, as in the laboratory. Moreover, in Tongan education, both mind and heart are treated equally as actual states of affairs worthy of critical attention, as opposed to science, which regards the latter as real obstacles.

### Talangata/Conclusion

In *tāvāist* terms, order and conflict<sup>43</sup> are of the same logical status, where order is itself a form of conflict, when two or more equal and opposite energies, forces or tendencies meet at a common point, defined by a state of *noa*, 0 or zero-point. The same runs parallel to connection and separation (or intersection),<sup>44</sup> eye and hole (or eye-hole)<sup>45</sup> and equal and opposite pairs of inseparable and indispensable binaries (*hoa/soa*),<sup>46</sup> all as two sides of the same thing. It is in this context that all the *hoa/soa* discussed above are mediated in the name of ‘*ilo*, knowledge, with a view to transforming them from a condition of crisis to a state of stasis through sustained symmetry, harmony and beauty. This includes a critical revision of capitalist democracy as an economic and political system, with respect to its contradictory effects on people and their environment, notably COVID-19 and climate change.

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40 Or *lea*, language, *tala*.

41 Or *tala* and *hala*, both vehicle and medium.

42 See *tala-e-fonua*, *tala-tukufakaholo-e-fonua*, and *tala-taufatungamotu‘a-e-fonua*, collectively pointing to knowledge, culture and language as inseparable but indispensable *hoa/soa*, i.e., pairs of equal and opposite *hoa/soa*.

43 Or *maau* and *felekeu*.

44 Or *fakahoko* and *fakamāvae* or *fakafelavai*.

45 Or *mata* and *ava*.

46 Or *hoamālie* and *hoatamaki*.

The COVID-19 pandemic, like the global climate change dynamic, is a human-environment crisis, both seriously requiring, in their diversity and unity, a constant mediation and consistent transformation to a state of stasis. Climate change is apparently looming large in the background, which too requires critical attention as a matter of immediacy and urgency. This human-environment crisis necessarily calls for knowledge in place of ignorance. The latter breeds fear, hate, conflict, war, killing and death, all leading to self-destruction of our planet Earth, our collective habitat, made up of the parts and the whole. This means placing knowledge of the past in front as guidance, and putting the future in the back, guided by refined past knowledge, both in the present, making our re-envisioning and re-realising of our common reality a matter of fact, the common measure of a ‘new normal’ for all.

*ANFF leva e malanga kae tau,  
‘Ofa hulu moe manatu fakautuutu*

Kolosalio Lea Tonga	<b>Glossary of Tongan Words</b>
‘Akau	wood
Ako	education
ANFF	Tongan for Latin ‘quod erat demonstratum’ (QED)
‘Atamai	mind
Ava-matangi	‘hole-of-the-wind;’ see mata-matangi, ‘eye-of-the-wind’
Ava‘i-fa‘o	‘hole-of-the-nail;’ see mata‘i-fa‘o, ‘eye-of-the-nail’
Ava‘i-hui	‘hole-of-the-needle;’ see mata‘i-hui, ‘eye-of-the-needle’
Faifatongia	performing socioeconomic functions; see Samoan tautua
Faifolau, faiva	voyaging, performance art of; see toutaivaka, navigation
Fakafelavai	intersection
Fakahoko	connection
Fakakaukau	thinking
Fakakonga	partial
Fakakātoa	total
Fakamālō	thank-you, acknowledgement
Fakamāvae	separation
Fakamovetevete	physical-social isolation-exclusion; see fakatautaha
Faka‘ofo‘ofa	beauty; see mālīe
Fakatatau	mediation

Fakatokolahi	physical-social connection-inclusion; see fakatahataha
Fakatupu	creation
Fatu	heart; see mafu, heart
Fālahi	width; see maokupu, breadth
Felekeu	crisis, hectic, chaos; see fepaki
Fenāpasi	stasis, static, order; see maau
Fepaki	crisis, hectic, chaos; see felekeu
Fonua	‘person’ and ‘place;’ see hanua, honua, vanua, fanua, fenua, whenua
Fo‘uvaka, tufunga	boat-building, performance art of
Fuo	form; see ta, time
Fuofuonoa	timeless, formless; see lala
Hala	way, path, road, route; see tala and vaka, vessel, vehicle, medium
Heliaki	‘metaphorically saying one thing but really meaning another’
Hiapo	mulberry plant
Hiva, faiva	music, performance art of
Hoa	pairs, binaries; see soa, Samoan for Tongan hoa
Hoakehekehe	opposite pairs; see hoatamaki, opposite pair
Hoamālie	equal pair; see hoatatau, equal pair
Hoatism	pertaining to hoa, inseparable yet indispensable pairs of equal and opposite binaries; see soatism; cf. philosophical dualism and anthropological binarism
Hoatamaki	opposite pair; see hoakehekehe, opposite pair
Hoatatau	equal pair; see hoamālie, equal pair
Hotau tahi ‘otumotu	our sea of islands
Ikuna	success
Kohi	line
Koka‘anga, nimamea‘a	bark-cloth-making, fine art of
Kā	time; see tā and tarag, time
Kaha‘u	future; see kahoko, kuongamui, future
Kahoko	future; see kaha‘u, kuongamui, future
Kalatua	culture; see fonua, culture
Kā-Wā	time-space; see tā-vā, tarag-wan, time-space
Kehe	diversity; see kehekehe, diversity
Kepitalisi	capitalism, capitalist
Koloa	treasure, wealth
Kuila	flag; see fuka, flag
Kuohili	past; see kuongamu‘a, kuohoko, past

Kuohoko	past; see kuohili, kuongamu‘a, past
Kuongaloto	present; see lotolotonga, hoko, present
Kuongamu‘a	past; see kuohili, kuohoko, past
Kuongamui	future; see kaha‘u, kahoko, future
Lahi	great; see levu, tele, nui, great
Lala	timeless, formless; see fuofuonoa
Langi	sky; symbolic name for Samoa
Lea	language; see tala, language
Lea heliaki	proverbial saying
Leva	end, conclude
Levu	great; see lahi, tele, nui, great
Liliu	change, transformation, transition, translation
Lōloa	length
Loto	desire, inside, heart
Lotolotonga	present; see kuongaloto, hoko
Lomipeau	Tu‘i Tonga‘s long-distance double-hulled kalia, canoe
Maama	earth, light; symbolic name for Tonga
Maau	stasis, static, order; see fenāpasi, stasis, static, order
Mafu	heart; see fatu, heart
Malanga	speech, touring orators, malanga
Mālie	beauty; see faka‘ofo‘ofa
Manatu	remembering; memory
Maokupu	breadth; see fālahi, width
Ma‘olunga	height; see loloto, depth
Mata-matangi	‘eye-of-the-wind;’ see ava-matangi, ‘hole-of-the-wind’
Mata‘i-fa‘o	‘eye-of-the-nail;’ see ava‘i-fa‘o, ‘hole-of-the-nail’
Mata‘i-hui	‘eye-of-the-needle;’ see ava‘i-hui, ‘hole-of-the-needle’
Matangi	wind; literally ‘eye-of-the-wind,’ mata-matangi
Melino	peace
Moana	ocean
Molumalu	solemnity-sanctity
Ngalu	wave; see peau, wave
Noa	0 or zero-point
Nofo fakataautaha	condition of physical-social isolation-exclusion
Nofo fakatahataha	condition of physical-social connection-inclusion
Nui	great; see levu, lahi, tele, great
Ongo	feeling, hearing, sound
‘Otumotu	group of islands, as in ‘Otu/‘Otumotu Ha‘apai, Ha‘apai islands
Papa	well-trodden

Peau	wave; see ngalu, wave
Pōpula	tyranny, oppression
Potupotutatau	harmony; see potupotukehekehe, disharmony
Pule kovi	bad governance
Pule lelei	good governance
Pulotu	ancestral homeland and afterworld; symbolic name for Fiji
Soaism	pertaining to soa, indivisible but unavoidable pairs of equal and opposite binaries; see hoaism
Tā	time; see kā and tarag, time
Tabua	Fijian for whale tooth; see Tongan lei, whale tooth
Ta‘efuo	formless
Ta‘etā	timeless
Taha	one
Taki kovi	bad leadership
Taki lelei	good leadership
Tala	language; see lea, language; also tala and vaka, medium, vehicle, vessel
Talangata	conclusion
Talanoa ‘uhinga	critical-yet-harmonious-talk
Tauhivā	keeping sociospatial relations; see Samoan teulevā
Tatau	symmetry, equal, mirror-image
Talakamata	introduction
Tarag	time; see tā and kā, time
Tautua	enacting socioeconomic services (Samoan); see Tongan faifatongia
Tau‘atāina	autonomy, freedom, independence
Tā-Vā	time-space; see kā-wā, tarag-wan, time-space
Tāvāism	tā-vā, time-space, philosophy of reality
Tāvāist	upholder of tāvāism
Tarag-Wan	time-space; see tā-vā, kā-wā, time-space
Tele	great; see levu, lahi, nui, great
Temokalati	democracy
Teulevā	decorating sociospatial relations (Samoan); see Tongan tauhivā
Tohitapu	bible
Toutaivaka, faiva	navigation, performance art of; see faifolau, voyaging
Tu‘umālie	prosperity; rich
Tu‘utāmaki	poverty; impoverish
Tu‘unga faingamālie	state of normality

Tu‘unga fakatu‘utāmaki	state of emergency
Ua	two
Uho	content, umbilical cord; see vā, space
‘Uto	brain
Vā	space; see wā and wan, space
Vaka	boat, vessel; see hala and tala, vehicle and medium
Vātau	instability; conflict
Wā	space; see vā and wan, space
Wan	space; see vā and wā, space

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# Weaving the Oceania New Normal: Thoughts on an Epistemology and Praxis of Liberation

*David Gegeo*



This short essay was produced upon request by Aisake Casimira, theologian, senior scholar and Director of the Institute for Mission and Research at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. In the written request, I was asked specifically to give some thoughts on what Casimira described as the New Normal, brought on or set into place in the Pacific by the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon first reflection, the first train of thought which flowed through my mind was that, for those of us who do not have the wherewithal, *prayer* is the most efficacious medium through which we can join hands with the rest of the global community in the search for a cure for the COVID-19 pandemic and together build a liveable and meaningful global New Normal.

In relation to the expression, the most efficacious medium of global human connection, I use the concept of prayer to mean not only the religious practice most commonly found among Christians, Muslims and followers of other major world religions. Instead, I use the concept to mean the practice of religious and spiritual earnest supplication, which transcends all religious boundaries, and in which anyone and everyone can engage either publicly or in the privacy of one's home, whether one calls it prayer or something else, and whether it is institutionally organised or self-defined. Most fundamentally, I use the concept of prayer here to mean the humble coming together in union through earnest supplication of an individual or a group with an invisible divine being or deity – a 'humble coming together in union' which has long been an intrinsic feature of the socio-religious and socio-spiritual ontology of humans since the dawn of humanity.

From the written request, it was not altogether clear what was meant by the concept New Normal in reference to the global COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific context, as the concept is used in a variety of ways to refer to a variety of post-traumatic lived experiences. However, being familiar with how the concept is used in other contexts, such as in disability literature, I concluded, perhaps presumptively, that the concept was used in the written request to mean a new socio-ecological ontology that has come or will come into being as the result of socio-ecological adjustments or reconstruction – political, economic, cultural, spiritual, environmental, ecological, etc. – which humans (and other living organisms as well) have made or will make in the aftermath of the catastrophic experience of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the New Normal will refer primarily to the Pacific context.

A new socio-ecological ontology is propounded as another way of understanding, perhaps philosophically, the state of being that is labelled New Normal, because all of the post-COVID-19 socio-ecological adjustments that are made cannot exclusively involve humans only, but every living organism in the ecosystem as well. That is, while humans, in making socio-ecological adjustments, may myopically focus on human societies only, the adjustments inevitably involve or will involve other living organisms as well, whether intended or not. The inevitability is simply the way that our whole ecosystem or socio-ecological ontology was naturally designed.

And so it seems to make good meaning therefore that the New Normal is viewed fundamentally as the new socio-ecological ontology, because the instigator, which is the coronavirus, is not human yet is an intrinsic part of the ecosystem or ecology of which humans are a part. What this means, furthermore, is that the New Normal is not completely devoid of or separate from the original ecosystem or ecology of which the coronavirus is an inextricable part. Rather, in a fundamental way, the New Normal is the reconstruction of the original socio-ecological ontology, only designed with features addressing specifically the lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. The scenario is very similar to that of an island society rebuilding itself after a deadly tsunami, earthquake or severe flooding – an experience to which Pacific Island countries are no strangers.

At any rate, it is indeed the case that so diabolic has been the impact of COVID-19 on the global community that the ways in which countries used to conduct their affairs – in politics, business, education, inter-ethnic relations, policies, international relations, religion, etc. – have or will inevitably have to

be restructured or reconfigured. While Pacific island countries may or will not have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic at the same devastating magnitude as other countries overseas in terms of the loss of human lives, they will nonetheless still be severely affected much more than they are now, as countries of the global community struggle to stop the pandemic and rebuild themselves.

This is not merely engaging in the sterile rhetoric of gloom and doom but, rather, describing the reality that waits ahead of us. As an example, as our major sources of aid and other financial assistance, such as Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan, turn inward to attend to their own post-COVID-19 societal reconstruction, we in Pacific island countries will or may face tough challenges regarding where or who to turn to for assistance. Out of the goodness of their hearts, our aid donors may still continue with their assistance to us, but it may not be at the level, speed and frequency they used to give when times were ‘normal.’

If this were to happen, we should be understanding and not rush to judgment, as the magnitude of the devastation they have incurred in terms of their economies and loss of human lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic is far beyond our experience with the pandemic in the Pacific. So the question is, what steps do or will Pacific island nations take in the construction of their post-COVID-19 New Normal? Certainly, we cannot switch allegiance and seek assistance from some other countries, because they too will be concerned with their own post-COVID-19 societal reconstruction.

However, while it cannot be denied that a stark reality of labour-intensive post-trauma societal reconstruction awaits the global community, we should take comfort in the fact that humans are naturally endowed with resilience and ingenuity with which they can bounce back from a catastrophic lived experience and get back on track. As wantonly deadly as it is, COVID-19 is by no means the first catastrophe ever to have devastated the global community. Our shared global history and regional or country-specific histories are rife with experiences of catastrophic phenomena of one form or another, some created by humans themselves, like the two World Wars, the threat of nuclear annihilation, climate change or biological war, etc. [I will not subject my remarks to the conspiracy theory entertained by some for political gain that the coronavirus was human-made]. Yet the global community has always managed to recover and reconstruct itself and go on with life in whatever the New Normal created as its post-catastrophe socio-ecological ontology.

Let me be clear, lest there be misunderstanding, that to say this is not to brush under the rug the nightmarish loss of human lives which countries have experienced or are experiencing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss is an irredeemable tragedy, and one dearly wishes there had been the medical wherewithal already developed and on hand to prevent the virus from spreading and becoming a global killer.

The point, rather, is to underscore the fact that, while humans are but mere mortals, we have also been endowed by our Creator with resilience, ingenuity and agility which, when put to use, can mitigate any catastrophic situation in which we may happen to find ourselves. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine how we could still be here today given the innumerable catastrophes, natural and human-made, that we as a species have encountered and successfully pulled out of since the beginning of our evolutionary journey.

Be that as it may, in light of the socio-ecological ontology shift that the global community is on the threshold of, what can Pacific Island countries do to

***“From their decades, indeed centuries, of experience with catastrophes, generations of Pacific Islands people have built a level of resilience and ingenuity and a huge body of knowledge which have enabled them to wade through and pull out of any catastrophe with remarkable expertise.”***

mitigate the pandemic’s diabolic impact on us with respect to envisioning an Oceania New Normal? Or should we not even bother and simply wait and see and then, when necessary, pick up the pieces and move on as we have always expertly done with every catastrophe that we encountered in the past, and no doubt will be encountering in the future? These are not simple but important questions which we should be asking ourselves in the Pacific – politicians, the business community, churches, universities, colleges, youth organisations, women’s organisations, and communities alike – because they help in giving us directions as to the kind of New Normal we may wish to build in the region.

However, while they are important, there is something peculiar or perhaps epistemically myopic about the questions. In asking them there seems to be an underlying implication that the idea of an Oceania New Normal is a completely

new concept or socio-ecological ontology that is peculiarly intrinsic to the COVID-19 pandemic only. Admittedly, it is critically important that the Oceania New Normal we seek to construct addresses specifically the peculiarities of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific. Yet, while the term New Normal may be a new addition to our post-trauma vocabulary in the Pacific, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, it does not connote anything new, but rather a socio-ecological ontology which is as old or commonplace as the fact that Pacific island countries and people are no strangers to catastrophes, as mentioned. That is, every New Normal replaces or is the successor of the previous New Normal or Old Normal, a socio-ontological shift somewhat akin to the Kuhnian epistemic paradigm shift, brought on by a catastrophe.

In any case, what do I mean by Pacific island countries and peoples being no strangers to catastrophes? From as far back as our collective regional and country-specific histories can serve us, Pacific island societies have been rocked to their bare foundations by one form of catastrophe or another, both natural and human-made. As examples of human-made catastrophes, the majority of Pacific island societies, with perhaps Tonga as the exception, were victims of colonisation and various in-country events of inter-group bloody violence, such as happened in Fiji in the early 1980s and Solomon Islands in the late 1990s. The same can be said also of natural catastrophes such as cyclones, earthquakes and flooding. Today globalisation can unequivocally be added to the list as a human-made catastrophe because of the disastrous impacts it is having on Pacific island societies in the name of development, through cultural denigration, religious schism, pitting groups against each other, and large-scale mining and logging by multinational business conglomerates.

Yet, from their decades, indeed centuries of experience with catastrophes, generations of Pacific Island people have built a level of resilience and ingenuity and a huge body of knowledge which have enabled them to wade through and pull out of any catastrophe with remarkable expertise. For example, British and French colonisation in the Pacific was among some of the most brutal forms of colonisation ever exercised on any human groups in the world in the 1800s. Yet Pacific island countries which managed to regain their political independence and humanity did so relatively peacefully. Admittedly, there were incidents of bloodshed which punctuated these events.

In any case, the same level of resilience, ingenuity and agility which generations of Pacific Islanders had peacefully exercised in regaining their political independence and humanity could also be seen in how they usually triumphantly

re-emerged from the ashes of their seeming defeat in natural disasters and constructed post-trauma states of New Normal. With the same resilience, ingenuity and agility, Pacific Islanders will this time make the necessary post-catastrophe socio-ecological adjustments and get back on track, whether the getting back on track is called the New Normal or something else.

### **Pacific Island Epistemologies and Praxis**

The critical point in discussing the lived-experience *know-how* by which Pacific island communities have always expertly dealt with catastrophes, whether natural or human-made, is to underscore the fact that, as we begin to explore different ways of constructing a post-COVID-19 Oceania New Normal or socio-ecological ontology, we should first consult our lived experience *per* island epistemologies and praxis before venturing farther afield. In other words, we should use the body of knowledge, resilience, ingenuity and agility with which we had always successfully navigated our way out of catastrophes as the base or springboard from which to venture into new territories in search of new bodies of knowledge to build our Oceania New Normal. That is, we begin our epistemic exploration or journey from our socio-ontological base or *vanua, fanoa, fanua, fenua*.

There are myriad good reasons for why we should apply our island epistemologies and praxis in our search for the components or building blocks of an Oceania New Normal. For example, we will not be starting from scratch but, rather, we will employ our island self-designed frameworks of knowing, doing and being which, since time immemorial, have faithfully held our hands, as it were, and escorted us to freedom and safety from some of the most diabolical situations in which we had ever found ourselves trapped, whether self-designed or by nature. Moreover, in applying our self-designed island praxis, methodologies, epistemologies and hermeneutics, we will be able to or be in a better position to theorise, should the need arise, and therefore go beyond merely amassing

***“Epistemic liberation and empowerment are critical in shaping or giving weight to the sense or feeling of island identity which the Oceania New Normal must have in order to be meaningful to the Pacific context. Whatever the New Normal ... is, it will be Pacific Island societies’ contribution to the global community’s social reconstruction in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.”***

opinions in our search for knowledge – and *knowledge* is what we have to have in order to build an Oceania New Normal that is firmly founded and adequately responds to our diverse needs in the Pacific. In fact, some level of theorising, intimately informed by our Pacific island self-designed praxis, epistemologies, hermeneutics and methodologies, will be necessary. The point is not trivial because in times of a crisis the tendency among humans is to accept virtually any information that is offered, without taking the time for close scrutiny to see how much of it is knowledge and how much is fleeting opinion.

There is something else which is critically important about grounding the building of our Oceania New Normal in our island frameworks of knowing, doing and being. There is a fulfilling sense of epistemic liberation and empowerment which comes from having an existing body of indigenous knowledge to build upon, rather than having none at all and starting from scratch. Starting from scratch can be epistemically liberating, yet in times of a crisis it can also lead to plans running afoul of design, as information can be hastily put to use without close scrutiny to meet the existing dire needs of the phenomenon under construction. The scenario is akin to building a house where, in the absence of proper building materials, one makes do with whatever is available. In any case, epistemic liberation and empowerment are critical in shaping or giving weight to the sense or feeling of island identity which the Oceania New Normal must have in order to be meaningful to the Pacific context. What all this means, in the final analysis, is that whatever the New Normal that will be constructed in the Pacific is, it will be Pacific Island societies' contribution to the global community's social reconstruction in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Put a different way, although the model of the Oceania New Normal might not necessarily be physically shared by the global community, it still contributes to the post-COVID-19 reconstruction of the global community, the global community being a socio-ecological ontology of which the Pacific is an inextricable part. There is something resoundingly liberating and empowering about this as it means, in the absence of the appropriate wherewithal, that Pacific island countries still observe or uphold their sense of responsibility to the global community by contributing to the post-catastrophe global reconstruction, no matter how meagre their contribution is compared with countries more abundantly blessed with technological and medical know-how. In other words, no matter how meagre our contribution might be, it is made from the heart, and that is what is important and human about it that makes the difference. There is something inherently beautiful about something small contributing to something larger than itself.

### **Envisioning an Oceania New Normal**

In view of everything which has been discussed, the critical question to ask at this point is: *What kind of New Normal should we build in the Pacific that will be effective in playing a recuperative role in bringing life back in the region to a socio-ontological equilibrium?*

In answering the question, one important issue to keep in mind, as mentioned, is that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pacific island societies to date is rather mild compared with other countries like China, America, Italy, Germany, Britain, France and even our close neighbour, Australia. The primary reason for this obviously is that the number of infected persons in the region is very low compared with overseas numbers. In fact, New Zealand and Fiji, which had the coronavirus, have now been declared free of the virus. The low number of infected persons in the Pacific makes envisioning the construction of a post-COVID-19 New Normal in the Pacific somewhat difficult, as it is or will be based not on the reality of lived-experience in the region but on projections or what is learned from the international media about the situation overseas. There will be a lot of theorising on our part, in other words.

In any case, views will obviously vary vis-à-vis the model of the New Normal envisioned for the Pacific. However, as discussed here, whatever the model is, in order to optimally serve the needs of Pacific countries it will, for the most part, have to be intimately informed by Pacific island epistemologies, methodologies, hermeneutics, pedagogies and praxis. Some of the reasons for the assertion have been discussed. Here, it is important to point out that, even if a vaccine has been developed, unlike other viruses or infectious diseases, the coronavirus can be contained or controlled from spreading by measures or strategies which fall squarely within the realm of Pacific island traditional theories of infectious diseases, such as social distancing, quarantine, social isolation, etc.

Although these measures or strategies have been incorporated into Anglo-European medical infrastructure as treatment, they have long been practiced or prescribed as organic medicine by indigenous communities around the world, such as in the Pacific, since time immemorial. For example, in Mala'ita in Solomon Islands, artificial or human-made islands were used as a social distancing practice or mechanism against malaria, yaws, leprosy, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases introduced by Europeans in the 1700s and 1800s. The human-made islands were also used as protection against tribal wars. The construction of the post-COVID-19 New Normal will serve a greater purpose if its vision also takes into account these kinds of indigenous bodies of knowledge.

## Conclusion

Different theories have been propounded for the origin of the coronavirus. However, the explanation held by the majority of people worldwide is that the virus came from the natural environment, not necessarily from bats as originally thought. Wherever it originated, the virus obviously did not simply suddenly decide to come out of the woodwork and start running amok, killing every human being it came into contact with. It is more likely the case that its habitat was disturbed in some way by something, most likely a human agent.

At any rate, the crisis is a good lesson for us in the Pacific to learn from to make sure our fragile ecosystem is left undisturbed as much as possible for future generations. The current escalating rate of gluttonous tearing up of our fragile island ecology by foreign-owned large-scale mining and logging multinational conglomerates, supposedly in the name of national development, makes one cringe as we speculate on how long it is before another virus as deadly as the coronavirus is unleashed. While the vision of the Oceania New Normal may not stretch that far into the future, it is strongly suggested that it will serve a greater regional and global purpose if it were to also include or engage in social activism that oversees the protection of our fragile island ecology. It is strongly recommended that, while the responsibility belongs to everyone, Pacific youth, being our future leaders, educators and citizens, should be engaged as the key players in or custodians of this line of social responsibility. And nothing is more *apropos* than the construction of the Oceania New Normal to plant the seeds of social responsibility for our island ecology.

## About the Author

Dr. David W. Gegeo is from Solomon Islands. He attended university in the U.S.A., graduating with a PhD in Political Science and Political Philosophy; an M.S. in Mass Communications and Public Relations; and a B.A. in Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology. He has taught at both the postgraduate and undergraduate levels in the U.S.A., New Zealand and Fiji. His areas of research and teaching interests include but are not limited to: indigenous/Pacific epistemologies; indigenous methodologies; indigenous hermeneutics; indigenous pedagogies; indigenous philosophies; indigenous ethics; cultural studies; Trans-Asia-Pacific diaspora; ethical development; de-colonisation; critical social theory; Third World politics; globalisation and change; indigenous historiography, etc. He is an Associate Professor in Social Sciences, Director of the Office of Research and Postgraduate Affairs, and Head (Ag) of the School of Humanities in the Faculty of Education and Humanities at the Solomon Islands National University.

# What is the future for the Arts in Post COVID-19 Pacific Island States?

Lingikoni E. Vaka'uta



It is easy enough to imagine what the arts scene might look like post-COVID-19 for our island states because it is an intellectual exercise. One can easily imagine the worst case scenario with continued or increased levels of neglect in terms of budgetary considerations. Or, we might imagine a new beginning where the arts are finally prioritised in terms of funding and other necessary resources. However, that is where the exercise remains intellectual, in one's head, followed by the occasional long 'sighs' if you think about it too much. Those of us working in the industry who do think about the untapped potential of the arts sector are often frustrated. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear of artists and art practitioners who have been susceptible to bouts of random depression given the constraints under which we have had to operate. But enough with the mental exercise. Let us move instead to more pragmatic scenarios intermingled with re-visioning solutions for the arts.

## **Givens** | A Context of 'Littles' and 'Lack ofs'

Before we talk art, and some may misconstrue what I am or will be saying, we have to state some 'givens'. By givens, I am referring to the factors or elements that influence or affect the arts and artists in our islands. These factors shape the arts landscape. I call them the 'little' or 'lack of' scenario. First, there is little or no budget for the arts, and while we can only envy New Zealand and their large COVID-19 response art budget, this is unlikely to occur in our small economies. Second, there is a lack of arts infrastructure. Again, this is unlikely to change over the coming months. Other 'little' or 'lack ofs' include – lack

of art discourses in local media or tertiary institutions; lack of art professional training to suit our island contexts; lack of e-commerce payment systems which allow for online transactions; limited or small local markets; limited access to overseas markets; limited/low purchasing power for the arts; limited local art literacies/attitudes about Pacific art and artists, and so on. These and other longstanding challenges mean that the COVID-19 response to art will be different in our more economically well-endowed neighbours of New Zealand and Australia. In the smaller economies of scale, each island country response to and for the arts will be dependent on their context, priorities and economic situation.

### **Post-COVID-19 | What can be done?**

When thinking of the Post-COVID-19 Pacific, we do need to be optimistic. On the one hand, many agree that if we were to remove the arts from our everyday existence, including movies/film making, music, dancing, painting and the like, the world would be bleak and boring. Add to this the economic impact of the many jobs and earnings of those working directly and indirectly in the industry and what we could have is a very sombre reality.

It would be too easy to paint a picture of hope—to dream a future where somehow the arts are able to thrive in our islands—but we know all too well that the challenges are both entrenched and numerous. It is a time to be positive about the future because sometimes that is all we have. Let’s face it, most of us in the arts have little or no money at all to support our own endeavours, let alone support others. For this reason, hope is critical and will perhaps leverage deep thinking and innovative approaches to addressing some of these issues.

It is important to note that even though ‘the arts’ are lumped into one industry, the treatment and solution for each art genre will be different because each has different nuances in terms of their needs. But since we are here (being positive), let us see how we can re-envision some imaginative alternative scenarios and solutions. In the interest of brevity, I offer four (4) possible outcomes.

- Let’s lobby our local governments. I know it is a cliché, but some of us in smaller island states have no choice and no other avenue for sustainable funding. It is also true that our local governments need to understand the complexity of the industry and the benefits that they provide to the social and economic wellbeing of our peoples.

- Speaking of government, it may be an opportune time for leaders in the art sector to begin considering a political career in government. My personal experiences of almost thirty years in arts have shown that those decision makers (in government) have no idea about how to make art thrive. Their main focus continues to be on selling to and dancing for tourists. Do not get me wrong, tourism entertainment has its place, but there is more to creating a vibrant, thriving art industry than through ‘dancing monkeys’ for money, so to speak. A success story from Fiji is the ‘VOU’ dance group, which is managed by Sachiko and Eddie Soro. VOU engages both the local entertainment market for income and embraces the artist (dancer) as scholars. They do this by training their dancers and sending them overseas for dance residencies. In this way, the artists have the potential to be scholars, not only in terms of their development but also to generate art discourses.
- We need ‘art spaces’ and ‘artist-driven spaces’. Small island markets and economies, coupled with other challenges, mean that most artists cannot afford a space to create, exhibit or perform. Such creative spaces are urgently needed. Talking to artists over the years, I keep hearing the same things: ‘We want to have an exhibition but there is no space.’ Often exhibitions happen where there is support from other organizations, with funding to rent spaces for a focused event dealing with the specific social issue or theme which the sponsoring organization has prioritized. In other words, there are few to no spaces for artists’ own creative discourse through works that tell the stories they want to share.
- We need more art discourse. By this I mean writing and talking art, where we consciously apply our own lenses and local knowledges to critique and make sense of the art creation process and products. Our people will only begin to fully understand the contemporary arts if we write or speak using the local lenses they can relate to. In so doing, we will begin to slowly grow the levels of art literacy that we want to see in our island nations.

There is much more to say but I will end here. It is always exciting and frustrating to talk about art in our context and explore the problems, challenges

and untapped potential in the industry. It is not possible to summarize the full complexity of the arts sector in a single essay such as this, but I do invite you, the reader, to take the time to speak with other Pacific island artists. I assure you, the conversation will sometimes depress you or it may excite you. And that unfortunately is life.

Mālō ‘Aupito  
Tu’a’ofaAtu

***About the Author***

LingikoniVaka’uta is a Fiji National who was born in Tonga. He began his art career as a founding member of the art group *Red Wave Collective* in 1998. He was based at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture from 1998 to 2008 as a resident Visual Artist. Notably, in 2003 he was the first Fijian recipient of the Commonwealth Arts and Crafts Award. He has exhibited in many exhibitions at local, regional and international solo and group exhibits. Lingikoni has served as a local art judge and has curated a number of exhibitions locally, including the Fiji National Fine Art Exhibition and numerous exhibitions at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture in the University of the South Pacific (USP). Lingikoni is passionate about community-based art projects and developing art discourses in the context of the Pacific islands. Lingikoni holds a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Economics and Computer Information System and a Master of Arts (MA) in Pacific Studies from the University of the South Pacific. His MA thesis examines the development of contemporary visual arts in Fiji. Currently, he is pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Pacific Studies at USP researching indigenous (Tongan) notions of appreciating art as lenses for indigenous art discourses.

# SPIRITUALITY, THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

## **Another World is Possible**

*Peter Loy Chong*



The coronavirus pandemic is giving the world an opportunity to re-envision itself according to God's plan. Currently the powers of globalisation and multinational corporations rule the world. Globalisation and corporations promise economic development that will trickle down to the poor. This has not happened. In fact, the poor get poorer and the rich richer, and the gap between the rich and poor, between and within countries, continues to widen. Globalisation knows no boundaries to its powers to dominate. Local and indigenous communities are the most vulnerable to the economic powers of corporations and companies.

Globalisation leaves trails of social and ecological injustices. Climate change and its impacts are some of the telling consequences of globalisation. Our modern means of travel, industries and extractive mining, such as coal mining, are producing excessive carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide brings about global warming, sea level rise, and other climate change impacts. We are polluting the

very air that we breathe and, as we do so, we mortgage not only our lives but the lives of the next generation and the planet in which we live as our home. Social media and accessibility of information are other features of globalisation. It connects people and disconnects people.

Globalisation is a human construct and therefore humans should be able to transform globalisation to serve human beings and creation. So far, human beings do not have the political will to reverse the negative impacts of globalisation. How we are going to humanise and transform globalisation?

COVID-19 has done what we had failed and lacked the moral courage to do, that is, slow down the trajectory of globalisation and the free fall of our world into the abyss. It has given space for people to focus on families, the basic cell of society. It will challenge policy makers to reflect on the purpose of development and design policies that will promote the participation of local communities. But this will require prudent government direction and policy regulation on how development is modeled and implemented. These are to secure the goal and purpose of development: the wellbeing of the human person. COVID-19 challenges the world and us in the Pacific on how we want to chart our development course in the Pacific so that it will protect human beings and creation – forests, Ocean, rivers and lands.

***“The worldwide coronavirus pandemic is not God’s judgment on humanity, but God’s call on people to judge what is most important to them and resolve to act accordingly from now on. It is our moral choice to make: either live differently or continue to live our lives as we were. ”***

Pope Francis states that COVID-19 is not God’s judgment, but a call to live differently. The worldwide coronavirus pandemic is not God’s judgment on humanity, but God’s call on people to judge what is most important to them and resolve to act accordingly from now on. It is our moral choice to make: either live differently or continue to live our lives as we were.

While we look forward to stopping the coronavirus, we must also look forward to a vision for peace, that is, a programme that offers humanity fullness of life. This vision must say NO to the globalisation economic system. The vision must reverse the negative effects of globalisation on poverty, the environment,

human rights and democracy. The goal of this vision is to solve the problems created by globalisation, and to reframe the globalisation narrative differently so that it helps humanity to live their lives in a different way, if they so choose.

This vision believes that ‘another world is really possible.’ We need to develop an alternative vision for the global economy and ours in the Pacific. We must depart from the kingdom of globalisation to another kingdom. This other kingdom expresses the growing longing of the world for an alternative culture, an alternative way of being altogether. The new way of being will be marked by love of neighbour, localised community, and a cooperative culture.

***About the Author***

Archbishop Dr. Peter Loy Chong is the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Suva in Fiji. He worked for many years in parishes around Fiji before he went to the USA for further studies. He is a graduate of the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva, Fiji, and Santa Clara University, California USA, where he earned a Doctorate in Sacred Theology.





## “Take Me There”

Inspired by the Catholic Archbishop Peter Loy Chong’s vision a child points to a world he can see, telling his parents it’s there, it’s real, and it’s not a dream. A new world is possible we just have to visualize it with a childlike faith.

Painting by Benjamin Dickson

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# God is Committed to Earth – Our Common Home

*Cliff Bird*



“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them ... See, I am making all things new.” Revelation 21:3 & 5, *NRSV*

‘New Normal’ has become the catchphrase as well as the resounding rallying call to break free from one way of being world and to move toward a new way of being world. I use the expression ‘being world’ because we make and unmake this one world. But let me be quite clear. The ‘we’ is not the maximum but the minimum ‘we’ of humanity. There are only a handful of filthy rich people who wield and control maximum economic and financial power and who, with the pervasive and camouflagic nature of the neoliberal economic development model, have so far succeeded in making and fashioning this world according to their image! This is an image that is painted, repainted and perpetuated with the insatiable drive for endless growth and spiraling profits at the cost of the God-given dignity of the larger humanity and the divinely endowed integrity of Earth, and of Creation as a whole.

As such, the journey toward a New Normal is not an easy one, but it is nevertheless a necessary and timely one to take. And take this journey we must. As with our ancestors who traversed the vast oceans and seas and crossed land masses through deciphering the sky-sea-land signs, so we as peoples of Oceania must chart our post-COVID-19 onward journey together through reading the

signs of the times. This is my humble contribution toward taking such a journey.

This Earth has groaned under the weight of exploitation and rapacious abuse, adhering to the logic of the economic development model that externalises almost everything other than profits. And it is quite often built upon and justified through a particular theological orientation that parades as if it is serving God and humanity, but in truth serves mammon more than God, humanity and Earth.

Our New Normal must involve shedding theological skin so as to reveal and nurture a renewed and new body of knowledge. Oceanic Christianity must move away from a literalistic reading and interpretation of Revelation 21, especially from the traditionally and uncritically held understanding that this present Earth will give way to a brand new and different one, and the seas will be no more. In the midst of the human pain, suffering and deaths caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many around the world see silver linings. Social media posts, popular articles, as well as scholarly works highlight how Earth starts to breathe and live again as a direct result of the lockdowns, grounded flights and besieged airline industry, diminished industrial and manufacturing sectors, and reduced sea-based trade, to name a few.

More on the text: The “first earth” which “passed away” does not mean the literal physical earth. Let us remember that “earth” or “world” as it is used in Revelation is symbolic: it represents the earth as captive to domination by imperial Rome and captive to sin. This “first earth” is symbolic of all those evils which had occupied much of the earlier part of Revelation – including the blasphemy of human arrogance, the rebellion against God, the Roman Empire’s violent oppression of its citizens, the power of the Beast and Babylon to deceive the nations, and the faithless compromise of the churches. These are what constitute the “first earth” and these are the things that “passed away” and have therefore been discontinued. The post-COVID-19 New Normal must be about the “passing away” of all that dehumanises, impoverishes and desacralises.

“The sea was no more” does not mean that John was necessarily anti-ocean. For a start, the sea in the text refers to the Mediterranean Sea only, not to all the seas and oceans of the world. Moreover, we must bear in mind that throughout Revelation the sea is used symbolically. In the narrative of Revelation, the sea has been the source and operational base for the evil forces lined up against God and God’s people. It was from the sea that the Beast, the personification of Empire’s deadly reach, had come. It was over the sea that Babylon had ruled as a tyrant. The Mediterranean Sea was the location of imperial Rome’s

unjust trade, including slave trade, which is condemned in the cargo list in Revelation 18:12–13. In the context of Revelation, all of these are what constitute the sea, and in God’s renewed world these are the things that had “passed away,” not the literal seas and oceans. It is common knowledge that the oceans and seas have been the location and route through which the tentacles of the neoliberal empire have entangled Oceanic peoples.

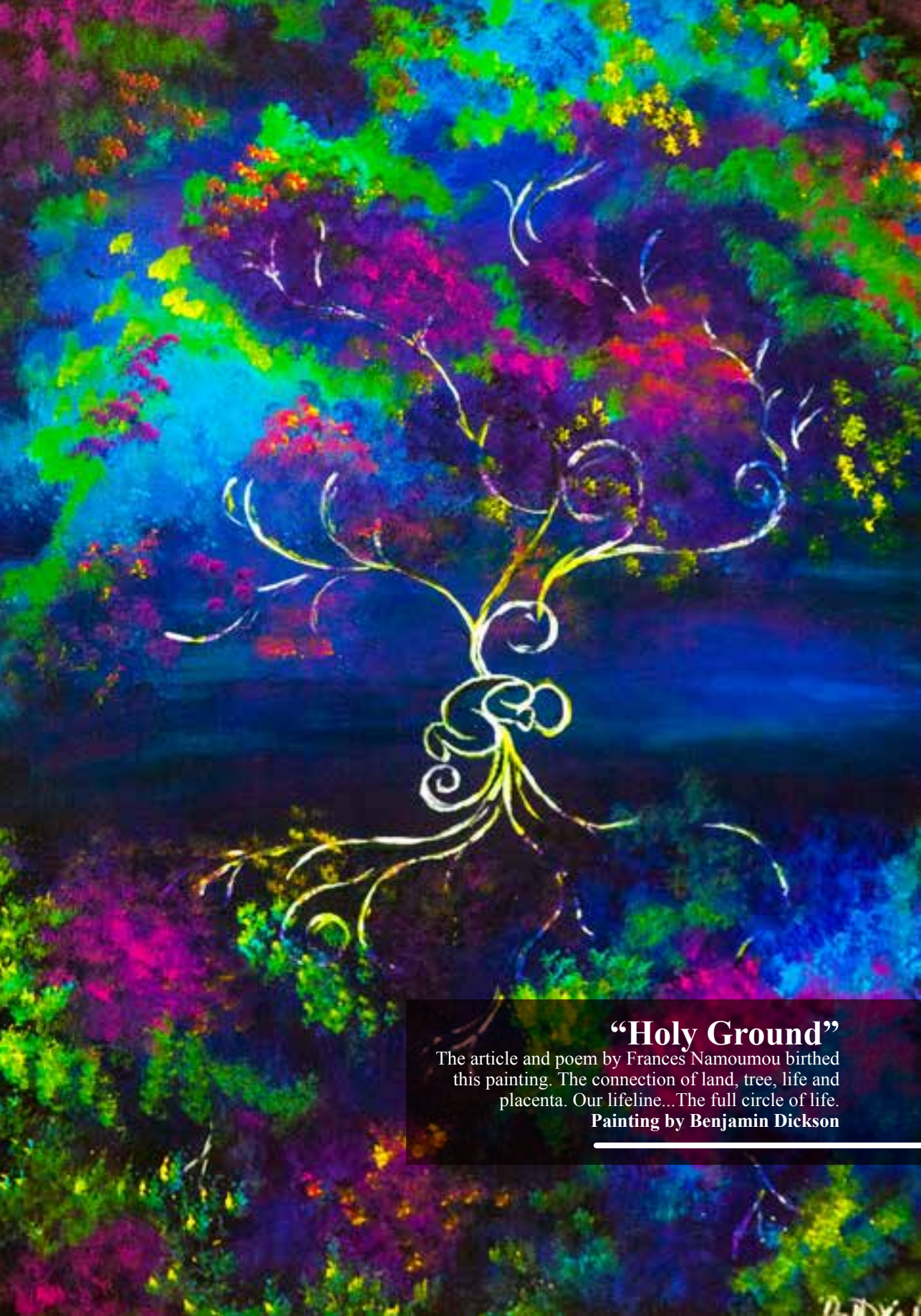
God is committed to this Earth – our common home as humanity and our shared home with all creatures. This Earth is where God dwells with all God’s people. Likewise, we must be committed to this Earth – to the oceans and seas that surround and support us, to the landed masses that nurture and house us, and to the atmosphere that envelopes and embraces us. Mending the severed connectedness between economic development, ecological integrity and human wellbeing is a necessity and imperative for a post-COVID-19 Oceanic development model.

**“God is committed to this Earth – our common home as humanity and our shared home with all creatures... Likewise, we must be committed to this Earth – to the oceans and seas that surround and support us, to the landed masses that nurture and house us, and to the atmosphere that envelopes and embraces us. Mending the severed connectedness between economic development, ecological integrity and human wellbeing is a necessity and imperative for a post-COVID-19 Oceanic development model. ”**

#### ***About the Author***

Cliff Bird is a Pacific academic and theologian. He spent many years serving in the ecumenical family in Oceania and beyond. Cliff is an ordained minister in the United Church in Solomon Islands, and currently is volunteer Advisor to his home church. He is founder and principal consultant/researcher of *YUMI Go Global Consultants*. Cliff is a seasoned fisherman and loves to romance theology and its place and function in development and in the public sphere. He is happily married to Siera T. Bird and they have five children and four grandchildren.





## **“Holy Ground”**

The article and poem by Frances Namoumou birthed this painting. The connection of land, tree, life and placenta. Our lifeline...The full circle of life.

**Painting by Benjamin Dickson**

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# Living Simply and Cherishing Life

*Frances Namoumou*



These past months have allowed me to take a dive into some deep self-awareness. COVID-19 entered our lives. With its own style and mood swings and if we are not careful, we become the receiver and transmitter of this pandemic. The source, no one now wishes to be recognized or associated with the source - how weird! But life must continue!

Cut off from the rest of the world, we thrive. We meet from a distance, we celebrate from a distance, we mourn as well from a distance. Becoming more aware of what is important in life and how best to make do with the little one has.

Our backyard garden has become our meeting space, talking with our children, our neighbours, our families, the plants, trees, seeds, birds, insects, and the land and sea that has sustained us for years. For the post pandemic, I hope to see more of this gathering and such meetings of communities of different sizes, colours, shapes and species. With ears to hear, invite voices, sounds, songs, tunes and silence that beats the rhythm of life in times of despair. Eyes that recognizes the agony, pain and struggle, embrace the courage to share love, hope and care. We are shaping our new normal.

*(Lali beating)*

Do you hear the *vanua* crying?  
Her tears of agony washed up  
My placenta exposed  
The pit of my womb aches  
Dried, burnt, battered and trashed  
Mourning  
What new life would be?

New life created  
Placentas uncovered  
Exposed everywhere  
Is this a sign?  
Are we cursed?

Or a simple reminder  
Rediscovering where we were  
sourced

Find your placenta  
Choose her new home  
Touch the ground that will breathe  
her life  
Plant a tree to give her an identity  
That placenta is mine  
The custodian of her new life

Oh! The sacredness of the land that  
we walk and toil upon

*Tulou saka*

*Noqu kalou na noqu vanua*

***About the Author***

Ms Frances Namoumou is from the province of Nadroga Navosa in Fiji. She currently works at the Pacific Conference of Churches as Programmes Manager. She is passionate in her work to address climate change issues, especially the relocation of populations due to climate change impacts, and advocacy at the local, regional and global level for more climate change action by governments.

# A Balanced World for Our Pacific

*Alisia Evans*



In the New Normal I see within myself a world of endless love and compassion. Of kindness and patience to grow in a way that is natural for me, a way that works with my body, that works with my mind, and that always reconnects with the spirit that lives inside of me – my soul. I know that what is within me is also in the world around me. My vision is one where the New Normal is a world in which the individual shows the same love and respect for themselves as they do to everyone and everything around them. It is a New Normal where nothing – no *thing* – is valued above another but held dear because each person sees and understands their connection with the other and life in all its forms.

I see a community that cherishes each person when they are born and continues to cherish them throughout every stage of their life until death, and even beyond. I see a people where both the bad and the good are cherished in equal measure. I see a community that respects those of us whose experiences and understanding are different from our own because each person understands that all experience is wisdom acted out. I see a people who know the truth that is to be found in the darkest days and welcome it because without those trying times we would not know and so cannot experience the light, the joy and the happiness that comes to us in our brightest of days – our good days. I see a people where love is behind each emotion felt, each thought created, and every word said. I see a world where the tiniest act of kindness is understood as the greatest expression of love.

I see families that love each member because of the differences and the connection that exists between them. I see families who understand that each member is on a unique journey to know and experience life as they wish to. I see families that do all they can to support the one who is on this journey to experience life to the fullest, without any judgment, criticism or negativity.

I see a world where the biggest wrongs – our biggest differences – are respected and valued because they hold a unique truth and a wisdom that no good could teach us. I see a world that understands all of this.

My New Normal is one in which each act – whatever the consequence – is always received with an open heart and mind because each act, whatever it may be, is a true blessing and an opportunity to choose love. My new world is a world that is in balance with itself and with every living thing that lives in it. My New Normal is love.

I am the wind which rustles your hair.  
I am the sun which warms your body.  
I am the rain which dances on your face.  
I am the smell of flowers in the air, and  
I am the flowers which send their fragrance upward.  
I am the air which carries the fragrance.  
I am the beginning of your first thought.  
I am the end of your last.  
I am the idea which sparked your most brilliant moment.  
I am the glory of its fulfilment.  
I am the feeling which fuelled the most loving thing you ever did.  
I am the part of you which yearns for that feeling again and again.  
Whatever works for you, whatever makes it happen—whatever ritual, ceremony, demonstration, meditation, thought, song, word, or action it takes for you to “reconnect” – do this. Do this in remembrance of Me.  
*Conversations With God – Book 2, Neale Donald Walsch*

***About the Author***

Alisia Evans has spent the last six years working with women's groups and organisations in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries. Her areas of expertise are research and gender equality, and she has engaged in grassroots activism and policy advocacy work towards strengthening women's rights in Fiji. As a woman of mixed ethnicity, she has had the privilege of living and experiencing two different cultures – Western and Pacific. She knows that one culture is no better than any other but true growth and development of a society can only come when there is mutual understanding, respect and honesty between people. She considers herself a feminist and is currently renewing her understanding of faith and spirituality. She has a background in human geography from Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. Alisia is currently the Gender Officer for Habitat for Humanity Fiji.

# **Tatadra ni Veisiga ni Mataka – Dreams of Tomorrow**

*Rusila Nabouniu*



This is a narrative of what my dream of tomorrow looks like.

Every wave is a new wave, low tide or high tide, evening or noon, whatever the day or the season; be grateful and embrace the waves that still choose to grace the shores of our insignificant lives.

The worldview that I, as a human being, am the centre of existence has been a largely accepted view for the many endeavours of man. All development that has been inspired or motivated by man has in some way upheld the upper hand to man's gain. It has fed man's ravenous ego. We claim to be high level thinkers of the species, yet our behaviour since the Industrial Revolution, which gave rise to the claims of modern Western civilisation, has been nothing but pillaging and destruction of God's creation both physical and moral.

This new wave of COVID-19 has been one that is and will continuously liberate human existence – from an existence of might, power, control and authority to one of abundant humility, generosity, spiritual submission and gratefulness.

Yesterday the village was grey and dull; the life of the village went to see the bright lights and never returned. But now they will return; they will breathe new life into the village. They will learn the old ways because this is key to understanding the new tomorrow. They will weave their experience of the

bright lights into their dreams of tomorrow, and from these dreams strong trees will grow at the edge of the forest.

The strong trees will guard and provide for all living things again. The trees will remember their duty given by the Creator. God bless the tree that is true.

Fijian traditions (and practices that we call normal) and occasions have become a display of wealth and stature; we have grown into big men with big egos. The wisdom and the genuine meaning of how those traditions came to be have long been lost. Traditions have become empty displays of power, position and wealth. The new tomorrow will humble the big man's ego and he will find the true meaning behind our traditions. He will bend and pay respect to the traditions of his forefathers and mothers. He will be reminded of his place in the great circle of life and pay his respects accordingly. We give thanks to the God of the new tomorrow.

*For whoever reads the dreams woven in these pages, please read with your heart. While comprehending the views expressed is important, feeling the emotions written within is essential, and hope it fuels your weaving for tomorrow. Action with no passion is undeserving of this gift we call life.*

***About the author***

Rusila Nabouniu is a young *Itaukei* woman from Fiji who longs for a future where indigenous traditions and culture are valued and respected, where their relevance is acknowledged, included and integrated into this journey of adapting to the New Normal of whatever is at the edge of human existence.

# **A New Spirituality for the New Story?**

*Jovili Meo*



The New Normal remains a recurring expression that appears after different catastrophic events in history and as different countries deal with their recovery in various ways. After the notorious 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America in 2001, certain measures were implemented that had repercussions worldwide. The Pacific churches have deemed it essential, relevant and timely to discuss the topic of the New Normal we are now facing, and therefore to pool resources together to assist the churches of the region as they venture into the future after the COVID-19 pandemic. I was hesitant to be involved since I now live in Australia. My contribution here reflects where I am physically and therefore my own self-isolated thoughts at this point in time.

During the past three months of self-isolation or forced lockdown, dictated by the government and supported by the churches in the wake of the fears of the coronavirus or COVID-19, my wife and I struggled to understand what this pandemic is and why we are doing what we are doing – total self-isolation. I was warned by my son who is a medical doctor that because of my ill health and prior health conditions and my being a 76-year-old man, I just need to self-isolate and stay home. Literally, I cannot go out to see the rising sun and to shake the hands of my son and other visitors ringing the doorbell. I only see them leaving the food they have bought from supermarkets at the door, and when I open it they are a few meters away. How I wish to hug and kiss them and say in our embrace, ‘Thank you!’ I cannot even give a ‘high five’ to my brother-in-law who is living with us. We are observing social distancing when we eat at the table, and prayers and church services take place through ZOOM. Certain restrictions have to be observed, like social distancing in public areas, restaurants, schools, parks, beaches, and even in sports. Contact sports

remain restricted – no gatherings in sports stadiums, no crowds – definitely not the usual norm. TV and radio audiences have become the alternative. The daily instructions by those in authority, the government and medical personnel, have been overwhelming at times, though they are no doubt issued with good intentions. They are all protecting us from COVID-19. Of course I am also attentive to the media around collecting ideas on the topic of the New Normal.

When will we resume a more ‘normal’ life? This is the question we are asking as we enter this post-pandemic period. Resuming anything like our pre-pandemic life too soon will spark a second wave, as predicted by virologists who fear many more lives will be lost. Politicians also fear the crashing of the economy and fiscal position of our countries. Compromising health to revive the economy will have a domino effect on the wellbeing of citizens. These two factors are very real and, unfortunately, both are being experienced as I write this article. This downturn and the ambiguity surrounding political determination and financial recession remain far worse than that of the 1930s or the aftermath of World Wars in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially World War II. We were not there to experience those trying times; we only read their historical analysis. However, we can still learn from their cumulative or collective experiences and expand on how they dealt with the aftermath of those terrible times.

Those of us today living in Australia and other affluent countries are fortunate, in the sense that governments in their political and economic responses have distributed varied stimulus packages to assist those adversely affected through loss of jobs and business revenue during this pandemic. We do not have to work to receive this assistance. Whether this ‘generosity’ is for political reasons or otherwise remains a hidden question. Economists tell us that the millions distributed by government are to stimulate the economy, where the people spend the money to help the economy and to help keep jobs, especially in food and household needs industries, and the essential services sector. Government treasury pockets are deep but cannot indefinitely keep giving away their own revenue. Soon the taxpayers will have to replenish the government coffers, apart from government reliance on exports and other sovereign revenue resources.

This is a juggling act, even for affluent economics like Australia. Economic naysayers are predicting an unprecedented recession, the worst in over a century. That is worrying. It may reign as the ultimate result of the pandemic. At 76 years old I would hate that result! This economic projection may be unavoidable, and it saddens me as my deepest concern is for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and successive generations who will have little choice but to live

through the new world norm of probable economic collapse, with this pandemic hanging like a dark cloud over their era. So what then is the New Normal?

I am being asked to write this article focusing on the Pacific islands and Pacific leaders in churches and communities, and so it is not an academic paper but my own story as I experience this pandemic. The saying goes, ‘No person is an island,’ because we are part of the global community. My second misgiving is that I am in affluent Australia, far removed from life in the islands of the Pacific for many years now. And so let me begin with a summary of what is happening in affluent countries like the United States of America and Australia. Television news and media outlets mainly report the COVID-19 situations in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. This is how it is in the world today and very little or no focus is on the Pacific island nations, developing countries in Asia, South American countries and the African continent.

The overall bad news is that COVID-19 remains an extremely contagious and lethal virus that is spreading like wildfire. Before that, it was known as ‘zoonotic’ because it was spread by species other than humans. The problem is that our human species has no known immunity to the virus, which is why the scientists continue to look for a vaccine until today. The latest news is that a vaccine will probably be scientifically discovered in 2021. In the meantime, more infections and deaths will occur in different countries. We sincerely pray and hope they do find a vaccine, because in the last decade medical science has still not produced a vaccine for other pandemics. In fact, we are on the 19<sup>th</sup> killer virus in our generation.

While governments and news outlets give reports on the death statistics of different countries, it is also true that there is more recovery than death. They continue to whisper that the ‘angel of death’ roams our streets and is killing people. They provide frightening statistics in most First World countries, but we know very few stories and statistics from the Third World or Global South nations. Yet these are the very countries which have the most victims of other pandemics like malaria, ebola, dengue fever, etc., with no cure yet to be found, only controlled vaccines in some cases. Due to remoteness, poor logistical support and even an inability to take a near accurate count, many of these countries’ death figures during these pandemics may not even consider those lonely deaths of undiagnosed or unclaimed people who are buried in uncounted and unnamed graves.

First World countries have formulated a few new norms to which they aspire after the pandemic. First, there remains the hope of a ‘V shaped’ economic recovery back to the Old Normal, which will be difficult to achieve. Full recovery means the return to all that existed previously, and to continue where we left off. But that is only a dream. History has proven that, after a catastrophic disaster, rebuilding takes years, and a New Normal is only a new way to accommodate and adjust to whatever follows the crisis. Second, it remains difficult to see how a post-pandemic world will pick itself up to carry on with commerce, finance and global governance as if nothing significant happened in the year 2020.

Recently Australia has been having a trade war with China, a totalitarian regime which has proven throughout the years to be very difficult to negotiate with, either on trade or human rights issues. The present blame game, which charges that the pandemic began in Wuhan from a laboratory accident or from an animal in a Chinese ‘wet market,’ is profusely denied by China. When a country blames China, that country suffers the consequences. China is so financially powerful that it can ruin the economy of a small country like Australia. Smaller countries like Fiji, Cook Islands and other Pacific Islands are hence cautious in their relationships with China, trying not to meddle with its foreign or internal activities. This is because they are heavily dependent on Chinese trade and development assistance, and therefore understandably, in a few cases, are puppets of China. China has become very prominent and powerful in the world, especially as the US, through the Trump administration, is withdrawing from world leadership with its focus on Trump’s election slogan, ‘America First.’

Intergenerational markers may now not only be based on and measured by biological age and socio-economic events, but by a post-pandemic generation that has been indiscriminately created with a common enemy in the global village. And so in a post-pandemic world, it may even be more difficult to convince the majority of working people to think globally and broaden their vision internationally. Perhaps the New Normal will be marked by withdrawing into our corners and living our lives resigned to the aphorism ‘survival of the fittest.’

When my wife and I were working in the Pacific, we travelled to many different island countries and worked with the churches for weeks and even months at a time. Pacific Islanders at the local level work together as a community, getting food from their gardens and harvesting crabs from the mangroves and fish from the sea. That was how and is the way they live their lives – a simple and largely contented life that is now envied by many city dwellers, and even by their own

relatives who years ago exchanged the village for the city. In a recent *Foreign Correspondents* television programme, ordinary workers in India literally walked hundreds of miles back to their home villages when the coronavirus lockdown began. These workers were laid off from the factories or informal work settings where they were employed and returned to their villages with the hope that their relatives would welcome them to share their lives and give them bread and water to live. It was reported that boatloads of Solomon Islanders who lost jobs and urban houses returned to the only place they knew would accept them, their respective villages.

That is the story worldwide. In the disruption caused by the pandemic, many either find ways to return to their place of origin or resist the changes. Most stay put and hope to resume the Old Normal. They feel they have to get back to work after months of unemployment. Whether the job is still available is another story. Schools are closed but, as I write, some countries are beginning to open up. Colleges and universities are also closed, and online learning or video meetings and conferencing are becoming the New Normal of education, meetings and doing business. As we continue to self-isolate because of the government's dictation, the whole question of our inalienable rights to personal freedom and our constitutional rights is being tested. Do we have to continue to be dictated by governments who fear the wide spread of the pandemic, or should we claim our rights back to assert our inborn freedom to do as we please in spite of the unpredictable consequences? This is the key question right now. The world is looking at new alternatives as the new way to meet. Churches and religious gatherings and families are using new technologies such as ZOOM as the new way of visiting each other. In several Pacific islands where people are returning to their villages of origin, this is where they think they will find solace and where they can begin again or continue living.

In Suva city, one has to rent a house or pay a mortgage, one has to buy food from the market or supermarkets, and one has to go to work 8 hours a day for 5-6 days or even longer each week. That remains the way to sustain the family and send children to school with the hope that they will excel. Our parents did that and we continued to do that prior to the pandemic. But what is our vision and our plan or plans for the post-pandemic experience? If there is no vaccine, we will continue to face death daily. Do we want that to be the New Normal? But even if we find a vaccine in 2021, life cannot return to normal as it was; we will still have to find a New Normal. Have we compared the COVID-19 fatalities with other fatalities due to heart failure, diabetics and other non-communicable

diseases? Are we just adding fire to the COVID-19 virus and making it bigger than it is?

Has the New Normal made village living more attractive and affordable in the rural Pacific for former urban dwellers? For those who are employed in formal employment, are they close enough to commute to work in the city or town? Would the influx of relatives to the villages increase the demand to decentralise infrastructure services and of course food production and food security? Will this decentralisation be the new norm in population distribution, economic activity and political life, and will it contribute to the economies of the Pacific island countries and the new Pacific norm? Perhaps village life is an attraction because there is no other place to go. The Fijian *iTaukei* can go back to their villages, knowing that in the village there is fish to catch, and there is land to plant root crops, and that is life.

***“For the early Christian believers, the New Normal was that they had to live in faith through thick and thin, and that was the only way their newfound post-Resurrection ‘normal’ was tested, refined and renewed. ”***

Finally, as a Christian, I dare to look at some biblical incidences of lockdowns and situations in which people had to find new ways to live. The story of Noah reminds us of crises in which people must leave the old ways behind. In certain situations of crisis, even with only a few remaining faithful people, they could not go back to their previous life but had to forge a new way of life. We also recall those great prophets who suffered with the people during periods of enslavement, oppression and even exile. They were also prophets of hope that a new way of life should be pursued and that they should learn from the past, take all the good things they could gather, and move on to the future. For them, at the heart of the New Normal was God. God alone was the centre or the ground of their existence.

For Jesus and his disciples, the three years of discipleship with him was their Old Normal, but their post-resurrection life was very different. They were confronted

with a New Normal, and we read in the New Testament that Jerusalem's newly formed community of Christians lived in wonderful harmony, pooling their resources together. They lived a disciplined life of worship, working together, sharing meals together, maintaining, improving and enhancing the community ethos. Love was the binding factor. Later in their journey, that community life of love and harmony was tested through suffering, persecution and even death. For the early Christian believers, the New Normal was that they had to live in faith through thick and thin, and that was the only way their newfound post-Resurrection 'normal' was tested, refined and renewed. For those faithful people, one important lesson they learned in order to achieve normalcy was that they had to face struggles in life, and face them as an interconnected community.

Has the New Normal presented opportunities for evangelism in our churches? Comparatively speaking, our Old Normal until earlier this year was congregating within four walls in our places of worship. Now this pattern has changed dramatically. Take as an example a church in Brisbane which has about 70 members but now has around 800 people participating and listening in their ZOOM online worship services. ZOOM and other electronic church services may be available in both the urban and rural Pacific. The internet is widely present throughout the Pacific. While we continue to observe social distancing, we may return to what Jesus did, preaching and teaching on the hillsides, near the farms, beside the sea and in the valleys. The villages may congregate on the shoreline or under the moonlight and stars. The omnipotent and transcendent God is both in the Old and the New Normal. God is present and has never left us.

*The New Normal reminds us that we can expect to be tested in life. We cannot escape struggles; it is part of real growth. The Cross, love and justice with peace should be the New Normal. And so the question remains: Is that our NEW NORMAL as Pacific Islander Christians? If not, what?*

### **Acknowledgement**

I want to thank my sister, Neini Meo Curulala, my brother, Semi Meo, sons Api and Emosi and daughters Pasimaca and Litea for contributing to this paper while I am locked down at home.

### **About the Author**

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# **‘Oceania Man,’ ‘Oceania Woman’ and Communal Resolve Are Key to any New Story**

*Maiava Iulai Toma*



Will we maintain the NORMAL that gives us deep inequalities, corrupt leadership, oppression and destruction? Or shall we dream a new one?

Inequalities, corruption, oppression and destruction will always be with us. These things do not disappear from societal experience, here in our region or anywhere else, because humans, by nature, are capable of horrendous wickedness and self-serving impulses. If we do not like seeing these things in Oceania, we need to act against the natural tendency of these things to come to the fore and take root in societies. We cannot look outside of ourselves and our national institutions for answers to these problems. The moral state of ‘*Oceania man*’ and ‘*Oceania woman*’ going forward, and our communal resolve for change, are key to any New Normal emerging beyond COVID-19.

It is a trait of the God-created individual to contend with difficulties and to fashion order out of chaos. Freedom of the individual to think and to speak must accordingly be paramount in our States. There needs also to be readiness on the part of appropriate elements of society to speak truth to power with courage and humility. Our national institutions of governance must be subordinate and responsive to the voices and wisdom of the people. These are basic conditions which ought to prevail in our countries if we are to secure the wellbeing of our peoples.

The freeze imposed upon our activities by the pandemic is an opportunity to look soberly at how and where we are in our journey through time. COVID-19

drives home to us the fact of our great vulnerability. We see it in the effects upon our small countries of forces from outside over the years. We all can quietly assess for ourselves the benefits or harm these things have brought us. We ought also to contemplate and reflect upon the nature and essence of some of the things that continue to bear in on us, to see where they may be taking us. To be sure, we are contending with some really heavy stuff.

We have been modernising from the commencement of significant contact with the outside world; all the while professing dedication to maintaining our indigenous identities. In time, cultural values and faith convictions together became undisputed markers of our identities. At independence, this very solid combination was declared by some, if not all of us, to be anchors for our ships of state. This is perhaps a good time to see if any ship is dragging anchor.

The great civilising culture we embraced with which to march forward into the future has changed dramatically in recent years in fundamental aspects. This civilisation is poised to take us with it in its revolutionary changes. It has us in a bear hug through its influence via things we participate in: academia, law, economic cooperation and aid, etc. The question is: What do we do? Is there need for a New Normal for us in these things?

Our natural isolation has been a lifesaving blessing, if only temporary, for some of us. Even so, COVID-19 suggests that it is vital for us not to lose touch in any significant way with the maintenance and enjoyment of things that are natural to us, such as our traditional food crops and the humanity and warmth of community; for to cut ourselves off from these things is to lose our soul.

***About the Author***

Le Afioga Maiava Reverend Iulai Toma is Samoa's Ombudsman and an Anglican priest of the Diocese of Polynesia at the Parish of All Saints, Apia.

# Relearn Kindness, Living off the Land, and Oceania Cooperation

*'Ilaisaane 'Olivia Tu'itupou*



We undoubtedly live in a fast-changing world with significant uncertainty, and with this pandemic of COVID-19 everything that revolves around us naturally has instantly changed. This global pandemic has radically changed our personal life, key priorities, and our appropriate level of alertness. For many countries, civil liberties and leisure have become limited to being homebound under the term ‘social distancing.’ We are instantly forced to change and carefully examine our daily choices.

Even something as simple as a frequent trip down to the local grocery store has become a potentially life-changing decision, while the internet becomes our only source of social life, source of information and way of doing business, regardless of the various levels of responses from local governments, business stakeholders and the general public. However, the most critical question we are eagerly attempting to answer is this: What does the unknown future hold for Oceania? This piece will focus on envisioning the uncertain future of Oceania post-global pandemic. The Pacific Islands, which are scattered throughout the Pacific Ocean, are popularly known as Oceania, and they are amongst the most fortunate with regards to COVID-19. According to the *New Zealand Herald*, there are twelve Pacific Islands countries that are free of the novel coronavirus pandemic, i.e., having no reported cases of COVID-19 (*NZ Herald* 30 April 2020).

The Kingdom of Tonga is amongst these countries. However, it has exercised precautions, as announced by the Prime Minister of Tonga (Government of Tonga 17 April 2020). There was a complete lockdown of the country for two weeks with specific curfews, and its borders were to be closed until June 2020. Despite not being hit with any reported cases of COVID-19, Tonga and other island nations are victims of declining business, resulting in the reduction of income due to the ensuing economic crisis. The lockdown instantly created a social and economic disruption to Tonga. The National Reserve Bank stated that Tonga's foreign reserves had declined by 22.3 million pa'anga (the local currency) in March 2020 (*Matangi Tonga Online* 29 April 2020). Oceania consists of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME). The majority of these businesses rely heavily on daily trading within the country and overseas, especially in our agriculture produce, fisheries and handicrafts.

In the face of all the potential losses and fear of uncertainty, there is still light at the end of the tunnel. We have come to relearn our kindness, living off the land, and, above all, that we in Oceania must work together. These are visions for the direction forward during and after this pandemic. Oceania's prompt reaction of closing down borders and working hand in hand with New Zealand and Australia to closely monitor the borders has adequately protected the vulnerable island nations and wisely given local people a sense of peace during the pandemic. Despite being isolated, online trading and essential services are now trending, as are schooling and business operations.

Moreover, people have become kinder, helping each other within their communities, and acts of crime have been drastically reduced. Above all, we are relearning what it means to be a Pacific Islander and to proudly live off the land and sea, developing the lifestyles which will benefit all the people in all the nations of Oceania.

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Ms 'Ilaisaane 'Olivia Tu'itupou is currently a graduate student at Victoria University of Wellington pursuing a Masters degree in Global Business and Management. This is her first published piece, and she is passionate regarding Oceania, for she was born and raised in the islands. You can find her on Twitter @NaneTuitupou for more information. 'Ofa atu!

# A Story based on Spirituality and Indigenous Knowledge

*William Maezema*



My vision for the Pacific in the story of the New Normal post-COVID-19 is that political, religious and traditional leaders will draw from their indigenous knowledge, their Christian spiritualities, and the Bible to design wellbeing policies for their respective countries. We cannot pretend anymore that spirituality and indigenous knowledge have nothing to do with development. The past months confirm this. The lockdown of our countries in the region and its impacts on businesses, causing unemployment and loss of income, forcefully brings home to us this point. But our situation today in our islands is not a time to be fearful, uncertain and depressed. In fact, it is a time for us to revive our ancient wisdom about life and practices about development. So it should be an exciting time.

Two of the issues that I wish to highlight specifically are agriculture and education. Our resilience and sustainability will depend on how we use our resources and the type of education that is needed for our children, and for the generations to come.

**Agriculture!** A new dawn is possible for downstream agriculture products for trading internally in the Pacific region. Agriculture products must be seen as the prime outlook for sustainable trading, while at the same time building a green Pacific. There need to be agriculture research centres to expand research into indigenous knowledge and practices in farming, and to enhance sustainable indigenous trading concepts. Agriculture must, first and foremost, be about the health and wellbeing of our people, and not about feeding market demands and

commercialisation. We must put the health and wellbeing of our people first, not profits. That means that we must promote sustainable farming methods, conservation practices, reviving the system of rotational farming, and also the wisdom of the taboos in agriculture.

**Education!** We need to revisit the prevailing concept of training to create a much more relevant and conducive system of learning. The system must include in the curriculum, classroom teaching and learning both theories (not just the Western styles of learning but also our indigenous wisdom regarding education and learning) and practical sessions on life skills. In this transformation, in a week of school a student will spend 2.5 days in the classroom, and 2.5 days in practical learning of life skills. Grooming, mentoring and nurturing our children to meet the future are very important. We must look into naming our teachers ‘mentors’ rather than ‘teachers.’ To enhance future undertakings, our focus should be to equip, empower, embrace and enrich our children to be able to meet the consequences of other threats in the future.

Agriculture and education are very important means by which we must ensure that the principles, policies and practices flow from our worldviews and are relevant to the needs of our people.

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Rev. William Maezema is a Minister in the United Church in Solomon Islands. He has served in various rural and urban parishes, with government working committees and civil society organisations. He completed a cross-cultural programme in Bangalore, South India. He is a Climate Change advocate with the Pacific Conference of Churches. He is presently a Bachelor of Divinity student at the Rarongo Theological College in Papua New Guinea.

# The Common Good of Justice and Compassion

*Raki Mamao Tigarea*



The terms *quarantine* and *lockdown* were rarely used until this pandemic came knocking on our doors. We need not deny the importance of being quarantined and locked down during such a catastrophic and tragic time, but at the same time we sympathise with the struggles of those quarantined and in lockdown who are the victims of domestic violence and abuse, the wage labourers who are quarantined and locked down without any work, the refugees, the migrants, the sick and their family members who are suffering due to this pandemic.

During the Old Normal we talked about expanding our horizons, and now the New Normal is all about squeezing up our spaces. In the Old Normal we socialised, but the New Normal has taught us that it is a necessity to keep “social distancing.” During the Old Normal, we talked about breaking down walls, but during this New Normal we are hearing “stay within your walls.” During the Old Normal, we talked about crossing boundaries, and now we are locking down the boundaries.

A post-pandemic vision is that a new social structure might be created. Many of the world’s nations once had established perspectives on life but now they have been challenged in our New Normal context. The common good must now be based on justice and compassion for all, respect for the other and human rights. We need to grow new social values that reflect our commitment to this common good. That is the Change, the Beauty, the new Way of Life we envision. Let us fight this pandemic, let us live, let us love, let us survive together, and we will surely overcome.

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Rev. Raki Mamao Tigarea is a Minister of the Methodist Church of Fiji. He currently lectures at the Davuilevu Theological College. He previously worked in the pastoral ministry of the church, serving congregations in Fiji and Rotuma. He studied at the Pacific Theological College, where he graduated with a Masters in Theology. He worked for some years with the Institute for Mission and Research, based at PTC, before joining the faculty at Davuilevu Theological College as the Head of the History Department.

## We Need a New Story for a New Norm

*Vilimaina Naqelevuki*



After all this is over I do not think the world will return to any form of normalcy.

I have not been able to sleep since this whole pandemic started; the experience of it has been anything but normal. However, after the COVID-19 crisis has passed, with its ravaging effects still freshly felt, I would like to propose a challenge, or rather a new way of thinking about life in our region.

I would like to see us create a new set of norms for the people of Oceania and the rest of humanity. Why? Because we desperately need a new story, one that will be about and of us, and one that:

- considers the *Lotu* to offer guidance, sound advice and most importantly prayers, like the fervent prayers and wisdom of our grandparents, our *Mapigas*, our *Bubus* and *Tutus*;
- will help the people who are the rightful owners of the *Vanua*, giving them a space to freely speak;
- does not abuse our women, children, elderly and persons living with disabilities;
- is inclusive, impartial, indigenous and gender sensitive;
- does not create barriers but provides opportunities;
- does not create further divisions and hate;
- is respectful at all times.

I would like to see a Pasifiki that is strong and bold, one that:

- is for its people, its lands, its customs, its traditions, its authenticity, its gracefulness, and one that will continue to fight the good fight for its people;
- would consider change, but not too much of it;
- does not base decisions and by-laws concerning the *Vanua* on money, but on deeply listening to and hearing the wisdom of its people, the people of the *Vanua*;
- does not make quick decisions on any form, shape or

size of development; ● will learn to consult, to listen, to receive suggestions; ● does not suppress the people but helps the people find their own voice.

This coronavirus has given us ample time to really think about what it is to be ‘normal.’ I would not consider the way we lived before this pandemic as anything close to normal. Many mistakes have been made, some more apparent than others. But we can choose to right our wrongs or, rather, to make known the wrongs we have endured silently for so many years, and find ways or solutions to fully address them, and to change the narrative of what was considered the norm.

Our people carry with us the prayers, hopes and dreams of our forefathers and foremothers, of those that have gone before us. Yet we have had our rights as the indigenous people of the *Vanua* weakened from within. The land from which we eat, drink, speak and live, the land which rightfully belongs to us, mostly does not even belong to us anymore. The choice rests with us. The *mana* of the land which we individually represent cannot be taken from us. We must make the change. We must take the first step and learn, relearn, rethink, decolonise, and find a new way of thinking and a new norm that is grounded in our values and traditions. This is where my hope lies!

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Ms Vilimaina Naqeleuvuki is a journalist with the *Fiji Times* newspaper. She studied journalism at the University of the South Pacific and graduated in 2018. She is currently completing her postgraduate diploma on Climate Change at USP. At age 23 and a Fijian woman, she is passionate about transparency and accountability of governance, and meaningful participation of people in how they are governed.

# Listen to Our Spiritualities and Cultures

Johnny Albert



My story of the Pacific for the New Normal, post-COVID-19, is that our Pacific islands and people are more self-determining in defining their wellbeing and development, and more attuned to listening to the wisdom of our spiritualities in Christianity and in our traditional cultures. The Pacific is and will always be our Pacific. We stood and will stand firm on our faith convictions and our traditions and cultures. In addition to this general vision, I would like to see that the following three aspects are considered in the story of the New Normal for our Pacific.

**Spirituality** is such an important part of the Pacific region. It is integral to our history and culture. In the story of the New Normal, religion and spirituality must feature in the education system. Christianity is concerned with righteous relationships, where justice, mercy and compassion are central values. It therefore has a lot more to teach than ‘just information.’ It teaches and moulds our personal and community attitudes, how we see others and God. It needs to be part of an “Education for Life” school curriculum. This will be a sound basis for moral education. The marginalisation of religion and spirituality in our education system is one of the factors that drove us to disrespect nature, exploit people, and increase selfishness in our world and in our region.

**Health** is much more than the use of drugs and medicine to cure diseases. Health is the prevention of disease. It is knowing how to live to prevent many diseases. It involves: (a) a respectful relationship with our environment, taking what is needed for our physical health while respecting the spirituality of the

environment; (b) a just and compassionate relationship with others – if one feels lonely or rejected by one’s community, or if one is bitter and resentful, one may become ill; and (c) one’s relationship with oneself is more than having a healthy body. Happiness and peace of mind are important too. In the story of the New Normal, we must include in our school curriculum the wisdom of traditions about health, local medicines and remedies, and understanding health in a holistic manner.

**Spirituality!** God’s people were intended to have respect for nature (Deut 20:19; 22:6). Human greed, selfishness and laziness lie behind many of our world’s problems of waste, pollution and exploitation. The desire to make a profit, to avoid personal inconvenience and expenses, or to gratify a selfish whim affects how we farm and produce what we eat. We must relearn the wisdom of farming from our customs and the Bible. We must revise our agriculture curriculum and include our indigenous wisdom in farming methods, distribution and consumption. This is to avoid the consequences of the saying that “the most dangerous ‘animal’ on the planet earth is man!” We must be friends with our environment.

### ***About the Author***

Elder Johnny Albert is the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu’s former Christian Education Director and the Clerk of the Vila Session. He is the National Coordinator for New Hope International and an Accredited Trainer of Christ-centred Training. He did his education at the Sydney Missionary Bible College, and attended the University of the South Pacific summer school on community development. He currently does rural skills training, coordinating a project funded by the New Zealand and Vanuatu governments. He is also the Roving Facilitator for rural skills training and field projects.



“Prayer”





# A Quarantined Easter Experience and Spirituality

*Mosese Ma'ilo*



The evidence of the Easter season (including the Ascension and Pentecost) provides a biblical basis for what I envision as the New Normal for Oceania in the post-COVID-19 era. From the Samoan experience, the COVID-19 lockdown during the most important season of our Christian faith allowed us to experience a quarantined Easter celebration in the islands. Although it certainly elicited an out-of-the-normal way to celebrate, it allowed for the quality time that we have been yearning for at times in our Christian journey.

It is helpful to remember that the first ever Easter, according to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, was a quarantined experience for the Lord's household of disciples. They had been in lockdown from the time Jesus was arrested until the Pentecost. For them, there was no more 'back to normal.' The normal had gone, and there was no option but to adapt to a new life in the absence of Jesus. In our case,

- The lockdown of schools allowed for a re-investment in *home school* (quality time for parents to become teachers in both academic and home economics learning for children).
- The closure of church community worship allowed for a revisiting of *household worship* (quality time for parents to become household pastors).
- Shops being opened at limited times allowed for a return to our *subsistence economies* for survival (motherland organic provision).

- Social distancing allowed for re-inventing our *va-tausi*, *va-tapuia* (respect for the sacredness of the *va* or the social, cultural and spiritual space between people).
- A pause in airline flights, coal industrial production, wars and nuclear testing allowed for a re-creation of our planet and our islands (eco-recovery of land, sea and space).
- Our children, who have experienced the preventive measures of COVID-19, will continue to wash their hands, and will pass on the same gospel of hygiene living to their own children.

This lockdown Easter experience indicated that our survival in the islands depends mostly on what we have, what God has provided for us as islanders. But we needed privacy to accept the realisation of such a New Normal. In these home-quarantined days of our lives, we have experienced transformation in the way we worship, learn, socialise and survive. Let us not forget that the success of the lockdown was effected by a return to the most basic unit of our island existence, the *aiga*, the family. It has been and will always be the starting context of our journey into the New Normal.

There are two messages of the Easter season (which extends until Pentecost) that I wish to reinvent in my vision. One is *sacrifice*. Whatever biblical theology we use to explain the central event of Easter, ‘sacrifice’ is the most meaningful reality, and the most relevant to every level of our existence as Christians, churches, and of course as persons. It was the greatest sacrifice of all, for God offered his own family, the Son, to die on our behalf. The sacrifices of the Old Normal, our usual lifestyles before COVID-19, are not trivial. Our unlimited travels, economic expectations and work ethic, church and religious priorities, have all been sacrificed. Even hardline politicians and economic giants bowed to the principle of sacrifice (lockdown) as the only hope in times of danger, an acknowledgement of the ultimate need for prevention and preservation, and the need to ease our anxieties. It was a very simple reminder that the Easter sacrifice during the lockdown is not only a Christian principle, it is also God’s principle and approach to bringing about the New Normal to the world.

Secondly, at the end of the Easter season (Ascension and Pentecost), Jesus introduced the message of *spiritual empowerment*. He insisted to his family of disciples (Luke 24:49), “. . . *I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*” Spiritual empowerment should not be formulated in a restrictive church sense.

It should be part of our everyday experience as faithful believers in what the Easter event has done in our lives.

Starting with the *aiga*, the basic unit of both church and state, sacrifice for spiritual empowerment during the Easter season successfully leads all of us in the islands to a New Normal. I am convinced that the post-COVID-19 experience will be full of excitement. It will be full of new experiences of how to change our lives – in our spiritual, political, economic and social relations. It is a moment where ‘quality of life’ means going back to the privacy of the *aiga* as a source of spiritual empowerment. It is an empowerment to eradicate fear, to sail into the future with confidence, and to realise our dreams, as in the film *Moana*. Society as a whole will benefit as better families produce better leaders, better islands, better churches and Christian communities. People who make policies and decisions will change their mindset, and embrace our common humanity to fight for our islands’ eco-recovery. The New Normal is not marked by certainties, but it is something we can shape together as islanders.

I am very confident that by allowing COVID-19 to cloud the mood of this year’s Easter celebration, God has a message of hope for us in Oceania. The post-COVID-19 world is full of hope, light and island spiritual empowerment, knowing that we have what it takes to survive in times of danger. As we shape our New Normal with what we have, we must not be afraid to speak up with one voice, for we are among the most vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change, diseases and cultural changes.

Stay safe, and may we all continue to pray for each other, our island *wantoks*.

Shalom.

***About the Author***

Rev. Dr. Mosese Ma’ilo is the Principal of the Methodist Church of Samoa’s Piula Theological College. He is a lecturer in New Testament Studies, a scholar and writer on Pacific Biblical Hermeneutics, Postcolonial Hermeneutics and Samoan Linguistics.

# Reclaiming Jesus' Prayer for Unity

*Apimeleki Qiliho*



My vision for the Pacific region is to reclaim the unity Jesus prayed for in John's Gospel: <sup>20</sup>"I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. <sup>21</sup>I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. <sup>22</sup>I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me. <sup>24</sup>Father! You have given them to me, and I want them to be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory, the glory you gave me; for you loved me before the world was made. <sup>25</sup>Righteous Father! The world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made you known to them, and I will continue to do so, in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them." (John 17:20–26)

This final part of Jesus' prayer for his disciples is so deep and is an important message for ecumenism as it brings Jesus into direct relationship with us as Christians. Jesus knew their struggles, hardships and human dividedness, and it was the longing of his heart that they be united. I believe that the prayer is extremely valid and most essential in our post-COVID-19 reality. In our New Normal, let us reclaim this message and make it real through homegrown Pacific approaches that manifest the unity Jesus desires.

In Jesus' vision he recognised that future generations of believers would arise and confess Him as Lord. Here, he also affirms and embraces the harvest of the

ages to come, the Church of the Redeemer, gathered from every nation, people, language and tribe. Our existence today as an Oceania that professes Jesus as Lord and Saviour is the harvest. The ecumenical journey we have embarked on fulfils the promise of a church founded on our redeemer Lord. His prayer reminds us believers that we must be one in him and desire unity in God. *Jesus is praying for us.*

Jesus prayed for three things which the Pacific region needs to consider theologically.

- *Jesus prayed that the church may be united.* I believe our Pacific church leaders claimed this prayer when they first came together. We need to reclaim it again in the name of Jesus: *‘That all of them may be one. May they be brought to complete unity.’* This is a sacred unity, defined by and included in the unity of the Father and the Son. The life that we share as Christians is nothing less than a unity in the life of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is a unity in which we not only reflect but also participate in the unity of God – the unity of love and obedience, which binds the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit. This unity of love and obedience is brought about not by the efforts of human achievements, but by Jesus giving us the glory that the Father had given to him. So our part is not to create a new type of unity, because we cannot, but it is our responsibility to maintain and express the unity that Jesus prayed for.
- *Jesus prayed for unity that can be seen.* This visible unity will cause the world to believe that the Father sent Jesus, and that He loves the church. This visible unity will clearly impact the world as Jesus did by showing us the unseen God in his humanity. So, this visible unity of the church is a visible revelation of the unseen God and His love for all creation. The world needs to see and witness this visible unity.
- *Jesus prayed for unity that is mission focused.* It is a unity that comes from the witness of the church, and that produces faith in *those who will believe me through their message.* The Father through his Son revealed this unity to the first disciples. The revelation was received, accepted and passed on by the disciples.

The Pacific region cannot escape the prayer of Jesus. He envisages and petitions his Father for a unity among his followers, which is grounded in the relationship

with the Father through the Son and Holy Spirit. The Pacific region can reclaim this prayer. The Pacific, our home, is where the church is encountering God and the world. And our relationships are to be such that the world will come to accept not only that Jesus is the true Son of God, but also that *you ... have loved them even as you loved me*. Our Pacific churches should be a *'loving home'* where relationships between members are a reflection of the loyal and accepting love of the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

***About the Author***

The Right Reverend Apimeleki Qiliho is a retired Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia, and a past Moderator of the Pacific Conference of Churches.

# EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY, SYSTEMS, MENTORING

## **The Dance of Relationality: A Vision for a Pacific Itulagi Education for Life**

*Upolu Lumā Vaai*



If relationality is in our blood, and for centuries provided us with the tools to naturally navigate through complex structures of life, why do we seem to be obsessed with a single-strandic way of thinking? Pacific education, including theological education, is slowly recovering from the colonial imperialist agenda. It is still a slave, however, to what Bishop Leslie Boseto from the Solomon Islands, more than four decades ago, called the *Eurocentric pod*. With its far-reaching roots, education is still struggling after many years to find the dirtified touch of the Pacific soil. After almost thirty years in the education arena, I am convinced that Pacific education is still revering the single-strandic ways of knowing to appease the *onefication* agenda of the cult of uniformity. This is a cult often busy with fending off that which thinks and dances differently, and as a result demonises anything that does not conform to its principles of truth.

But we need to move on. We need to find the bright sun foiled by the traveling clouds of (neo)colonisation – the *colon* that *digests* and absorbs all lands, cultures, peoples and worldviews in the name of *one truth*. The word *neo* means that Pacific education is just refreshing the mission of the *colon*, that is, “to digest.” It runs on it because it is abundant, familiar and easy to use to control others, even though it is unsustainable.

Changing our personal, economic, political or religious stories requires re-storying education. Instead of giving Pacific people a story, we need to allow them to find their stories with the help of passion and creative imagination – stories housed and stored in the *ōpū* (stomach or seat of thought), as Maohinui people call it. Pacific people normally internalise stories as food for mana and growth. We need to mentor them to search for their own life-affirming story. To ask hard questions and to be ready to dance differently to the rhythms and patterns of their stories. To think and weave multi-strandically when they come to understand reality. And to delve deeper into their gifted potentialities to find originality, criticality, and the capacity to deal with complexity in their own creative ways.

This vision starts with reimagining the *colon*. Not as a digestive and absorbing system, but rather as a colon (:) that has a twofold function. The first is to invite pause. A pause that disrupts the flow of the normal storyline to warn the story people that something new is coming. The second is to precede and introduce something – to invite the story people to expect a new turn in the story. The *colon* here is symbolic of not only pausing to reflect, to unsettle the flow of the normal, but also introducing space to discern a new turn. A new vision. A new path for our story of life. Pandemics, natural disasters and economic instabilities act as a *colon* not only to unsettle what has been called the “correct normal” but also to introduce a space to dare to introduce a new path.

Education is a relationship, not a mere academy. It is more about *relating* and *mentoring* than teaching; it is woven into the everyday mentorship structure of life. The latter carries elements of a ‘know-it-all’ mentality. The former allows us to learn enough to learn that we do not know enough. My vision is to turn to re-find this new/old path. A path found in restoring the *relationality* of the Pacific itulagi, ‘*our side of the horizon*’ or ‘*our side of the heavens*’ (see picture). This is a liberating and transformative path gifted to us by God to make us think and do things differently. Educators are pathfinders who assist communities to find their life-affirming paths – paths that should lead to an auguring vision for education that is *life-driven* rather than market-driven. That emphasises *all-ness*



rather than one-ness, *fluidity* rather than rigidity, *multi-strand* rather than single-strand, *imagination* rather than regulation, *ground-up* rather than top-down, *let-be* rather than must-be, and *complexity* rather than onefication. Hence it is a call for a relational turn to re-centre life.

Relationality is a dance of complexity. It is about dancing imaginatively to the complex yet relational tune and rhythm

of God's life with us as Pacific people. In this dance we become free to reposition ourselves in the interweaving of words, movements, sounds, patterns, bodies, meanings and issues. Without directives and strict boundaries, it invites us to twirl away freely and unapologetically from the controlled dancing grounds dictated by the cult of uniformity. This is a dance that inspires us to rediscover wellbeing in the rhythms of life expressed in little practices such as fishing, planting, oral stories, feasting, birthing, and events such as death, pandemics, storms and dirt that we often push aside. It is informed by the silent whispers of the *vanua* and the graceful movements of *vaitafe* (moving rivers). Transformed by the fluidity and unpredictability of the *vasa* (ocean vastness). Animated by the *mānava ola* (breath of life) of the *vaomatua* (the elder forest). Dirtified by the rising dust from the *malae*, the ceremonial grounds of the Pacific dirt communities. Fused with oral stories, theologies, memories, music, laughter, art and poetry from the village fields, and replenished by the waters and smoke of earth rituals. Encouraged by the community cooperative practices of adaptation and resilience in the face of climate change and natural disasters, and fuelled by traditions of respecting and living and breathing *with* others in the non-human world.

It is a dance that allows us to embrace not just the *fertility of the living* but also the *fertility of the dead*. The former is about abundance of life and gifts found in the seen. The latter is about the sacredness of life and gifts found in the unseen – things not visible to our naked eyes but full of potency and mana to replenish and restore life in their own way. The keyword here is *embrace*, a word that runs throughout Archbishop Winston Halapua's *moana theology*. Education as

an imaginative dance finds its pulse in the *embrace*: a creative multi-strandic weaving that includes also the raw life experiences that make up the complex yet interconnected mat of life that often cease to exist when a learner walks into a classroom.

At the heart of this vision is retooling ourselves with the correct tools from our *itulagi*. These are tools that will inspire us to use even what is labelled small and insignificant by the cult of uniformity. Education ceases to be a liberating force if it fails to embrace complexity in order to see things holistically. It fails if it does not address the injustices of the single-strandic development models preached and implemented by the followers of the cult of uniformity.

As an island boy who grew up both in the forest and along the coast of the island of Savaii, Samoa, learning from how both the forest people and the coastal people naturally adjust to the complex structures of life in these spaces, making them resilient in the face of extreme challenges, I hope to see Pacific education adjust itself to teach people the power to navigate complexity; the tools to articulate with an *all-ness* mindset; the courage to analyse as an islander and not as a foreigner; the freedom to be creative without fear of being policed; and the passion to be deeply rooted in ever flowing trans-generational life-affirming values.

Having said this, it is also a call to remind us that the Pacific *itulagi* is only one of the many strands that are distinct yet interrelated and should be woven next to each other in the complex story of life. It is a call also for Pacific communities to have the courage to dare to deconstruct even the very values and pedagogies we seem to claim as *indigenous* and the *fairest of them all*, as they might already have been cloned by the cult of uniformity disguised in the form of a system, a neighbour or a family.

### ***About the Author***

Upolu Lumā Vaai grew up on his family land called *Le Pale* (*pale* means ‘to rest’) in the island of Savaii, the last resting place of spirits before they depart for *pulotu*, the underworld, with its portals found just next door in the village of Falealupo. Hence he grew up being educated with a relational multi-strandic worldview that embraces both the upper world and the underworld, life and death, seen and unseen, church and society. This relationality underpins his philosophy and shapes his work as an educator and theologian. He is currently Professor of Theology & Ethics and Principal of the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. He is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Samoa.



## **“Live and Learn”**

“Education is a relationship, not a mere academy...”

Education is a way of life...

**Painting by: Benjamin Dickson**

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# **We will know we have arrived when we hear the ancestors sing | A Necessary Reset**

*Frances C. Koya-Vaka'uta*



## **Dreaming a New Normal**

There is no doubt in my mind that it is time to press the reset button on Pacific education. COVID-19 is a stark reminder that the economic world order is not sustainable and that education needs to move beyond this value system to prepare our young for a New Normal. The global pandemic adds to a myriad of issues highlighting the need for a new system of teaching and learning – one that extends beyond book learning to practical life skills and knowledge and encourages family and community engagement. This new system will equip our people to manage the challenges posed by climate change, natural disasters, economic shocks, food insecurity, NCDs, high levels of school pushouts and unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and increasing family-based violence and crime.

Responses to the closure of schools during the pandemic have revealed how deeply entrenched the certification mentality actually is. While parents felt an initial relief at the closure of schools and fear the premature resumption of classes, Ministries of Education were quick to announce the shift to home schooling activities and online learning options. The latter pointed to the urgency of meeting time-bound educational outcomes and a collective discomfort in the possibility of a long pause or break from academic study. It is, of course, a natural human reaction to try to regain some form of control in an otherwise chaotic situation. In education, this meant pushing children back to the books to keep them busy and to maintain some form of academic continuity.

Interestingly, there has not been any public discourse on the opportunity that this presents for an inward reflection on the most critical of questions: *Education for what and whom?* Rather, the rush has been to quickly resume some semblance of what we think is normal. However, the Old Normal is an outdated education system and form of assessment that has failed our people for a long time now. It is a 'normal' which privileges book learning, pen-and-paper tests and rote learning, in a content-full, examination driven system which pushes out as many as 40% of students each year. It is a 'normal' which is not fit for its purpose.

It is no secret that formal education, like its sister ideologies of politics and development, promotes an inherently racist system privileging Western ways of knowing, being and doing. It is part of the legacy of our recent colonial past, having deemed Pacific languages, culture and all things indigenous unworthy of curriculum inclusion. It is a message so well ingrained that independent Pacific states continue to question their educational worthiness. Instead, teacher training, classroom teaching and assessment practices continue to prioritise Western theory and approaches to teaching and learning. Shamefully, we ignore the glaring mismatch and gaps and our systems continue to label students as failures when they struggle to adapt to the foreign system of learning and doing.

We have known for a long time now, through research and experience, that the best forms of education are contextualised to local needs; that meaningful learning is by doing and not memorisation; that culture plays a significant role in the teaching and learning process; and that relevance is at the heart of education for sustainability. And still our systems fail to acknowledge the culture gap and language gaps in our classrooms, insisting that our children sacrifice their creativity and identity in exchange for academic success and economic productivity.

The absence of political will to contextualise Pacific education systems points to decision makers who do not seem to have found the right time to rethink our education systems. A heavy reliance on development aid and the politics of those relationships means that transforming our systems is too costly an exercise to even consider. COVID-19 reminds us, however, that it is costly to ignore the wisdom of indigenous education which promotes, above all else, resilience and sustainability. Book knowledge and rote learning may help children get through pen-and-paper exams but do not necessarily inculcate the values, attitudes and behaviours required to survive, and indeed thrive, in a time of crisis. Both COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclone Harold have reinforced the need for practical

life skills such as food preservation, herbal medicines, gardening, fishing and house building.

Across the world and in many Pacific island nations, COVID-19 has led to a shift to online learning. Unfortunately, this merely moves the content-driven classroom into the home, where many parents are ill equipped to help their children, and shifts attention from blackboards to computer screens. This transition has occurred without taking into account factors such as varying levels of digital literacy; access to, speed and cost of internet connections; and the added financial burden to families who are already struggling to make ends meet. Psychologically, children are not immune to the anxiety and stresses that the uncertainty of a global pandemic presents. It is therefore unreasonable to expect them to simply pick up where they left off and to do so on a completely new platform to which they may not have been properly introduced. At the same time, the psychology of the teacher must be taken into account. The shift to online education means that Pacific teachers are struggling to familiarise themselves with a new system of delivery.

While e-learning promises convenience and continuity of educational programmes, it does not consider the widening educational divide that it creates. Those already disadvantaged now need to secure electronic devices and regular internet access. For those in rural and remote communities, intermittent electricity is an added barrier to learning. Yet another challenge is the lack of books in the home and the absence of local libraries. Put simply, this system privileges urban dwellers and higher income earners. On the flip side, some children are continuing with book learning in the home, with no means of communicating with their teachers to receive feedback on completed tasks. While ministries of education may make textbooks and task sheets available for their use, with no meaningful feedback on completed work this is still simply a case of keeping students busy. Essentially, meaningful learning will be severely affected, even for the most promising students.

### **A necessary reset**

Now more than ever, it is obvious that we need holistic learning experiences, or what some call *education of the whole child*. For the Pacific child, this means finding a balance between Western knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems and the distinct sets of skills, pedagogies and assessment approaches that they each provide. It means a total reset in our understanding of what worthwhile educational outcomes look like. We need a futures-thinking approach that looks beyond education for employment and higher education to a focus

on contextual knowledge and life skills. There is real potential for curriculum reform towards a new learning for resilience at the individual and community level, but it will require political will and investment. Such a transition calls for deep reflection and collaboration with local communities to identify and incorporate those values, knowledges and skills most significant and useful to specific contexts.

Pedagogically, we need to rethink teachers' roles as we move into discovery and self-directed learning, allowing students to engage in explorative processes and reasoning through individually paced learning and problem solving. This requires an adjustment to assessment and evaluation, whereby a student's progress is measured against his or her own level of achievement. Online tests and examinations raise the issue of plagiarism, as it would be quite easy for someone else to sit an online test in place of a student. This is a recipe for disaster – that is, unless serious thought is given to what exactly is being assessed and for what purpose. To be sure, digital literacy will remain a critical skill that needs to be prioritised from an early age; but at the same time, it is necessary to invest in print-based learning, in particular, the writing and publication of high-quality, low-cost local books and educational materials. Local learning centres and community libraries will also need to be prioritised.

***“Central to the idea of Pacific resilience is a deep spirituality or sense of connectedness. This spiritual self ... recognises the relationality that underpins all Pacific indigenous values and practices. It reinforces an inherent connection to land, sky and sea and reaffirms interdependence with all other forms of life. ”***

Content-wise, envisioning the New Normal presents an opportunity to add value to traditional Western curriculum subject areas. We could, for example, see an integration of traditional food preparation and preservation methods, slow food cooking and herbal medicines into Food Science and the Culinary Arts. Indigenous science could be incorporated into the Science curriculum with content such as reading weather patterns and seasonal shifts, traditional architecture and navigation; and agricultural science could include seasonal planting using moon cycles and other indigenous approaches.

Given the declining levels of literacy and proficiency in Pacific languages, it is also an opportune time to prioritise language learning coupled with underpinning life-philosophies, core beliefs and values, as well as common cultural practices. Cultural values and wisdom could be incorporated into subject areas such as Pastoral Care, Family Life education, or Values education. These could lead into Civics education, where conversations about what it means to ‘be’ and ‘belong,’ rights, responsibilities and community wellbeing are prioritised. In this way, students will be better able to situate their own sense of self within a broader communal and national identity. Heritage and contemporary arts could also be included in Culture Studies, another important area which could see more young people learn about themselves and their community. Likewise, Pacific stories should be incorporated into Literature texts. Unfortunately, Pacific youth know more about world history than their own, and it would be wonderful to see Pacific History taught at school as well as a shift towards Geography and Social Science about the region.

Above all else, the ideal Pacific education system would foster the development of Resilience Literacies. Sadly, popular global discourse on environmental or ecological resilience has downplayed its critical significance in other disciplines. In fact, it is an important concept in economics, psychology, sociology and education, where individual, family and community/group systems’ capacities to deal with external pressures and disruptions are examined. So what exactly are these resilience literacies, and what value would they bring to a Pacific educational reset?

I have argued elsewhere that resilience literacies are comprised of core attributes (personal characteristics) and basic competencies (physical/intellectual abilities) which contribute to an innate ability to adapt or respond to change. It is this adaptability that will enable the Pacific child to thrive within and beyond the schooling experience. Central to the idea of Pacific resilience is a deep spirituality or sense of connectedness. This spiritual self nurtures self-love and worth, and recognises the relationality that underpins all Pacific indigenous values and practices. It reinforces an inherent connection to land, sky and sea and reaffirms interdependence with all other forms of life, past, present and future. This includes flora and fauna, the ancestors and future generations to come, as well as acknowledgement of a higher being.

Resilience literacies capture the essence of holistic wellness and emotional intelligence critical for mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. They emphasise the inevitability of uncertainty and change, the need for adaptability,

and the importance of critical and creative thinking for effective problem-solving. Figure 1 below summarises what this looks like at a conceptual level. Essentially, resilient individuals and collectives are empowered with agency and therefore possess an inner strength through self-awareness and confidence in their ability to respond to change.

**Figure 1: Resilience Literacies**



The New Normal requires a new way of thinking about education. It demands a value system which privileges communal wellbeing and nurtures values such as hope, generosity, love, compassion, empathy and integrity. In promoting this new system of learning, we might finally shed the economic dependency of our past and assert our future collective selves. Success will come when we collectively reaffirm the indignation of our ancestors at the absurdity of ever having thought it was a good idea to deny our children their identities in order to achieve what we once thought was a better quality of life. Instead, the quality of life we seek is one that reaffirms who we are, where we are. The future we demand is one that gives dignity to our past, provides sustainable livelihoods for our people and an unwavering confidence that we have the agency that we need to bring about the change that we want. Ultimately, it will be in our honouring of our most sacred role as custodians that we will lay the foundations for the generations to come and, in so doing, embrace the true meaning of sustainability. This is a necessary reset and we will know we have arrived when we hear the ancestors sing.

***About the Author***

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# Vision for Pacific Island Education

*Manuie Vilsoni*



The coronavirus pandemic is a game changer! Islands with internet capacity and IT capabilities cater for students' distance learning needs. Others have to be really innovative and resourceful. It is indeed sad to read about people struggling during this lockdown period and endeavouring to meet the quarantine protocols. While the majority heed the STAY AT HOME appeal from the authorities, the curfew breaker numbers increase.

One may ask, "where is our faith, obedience, civic duty and traditional obligation?" Perhaps going 'secular' has made us drift away from our parents' religious teachings and our cultural DNA. Perhaps the chipping away of our unique cultural identity and attempts to social engineer us into one common label have made some of us lose our RESPECT for traditional authority. Once upon a time, a chief's wise counsel and instructions during a crisis were followed to the letter. There was a traditional system of social cohesion in place.

When my children were small and at their most impressionable, we were lucky to be living on our tiny and isolated island with no kindergarten. As a result, I coached them in vegetable growing, swimming, fishing, walking on the reef, survival skills, cycling, climbing trees, and how to respect elders, complete work and chores and, of course, practice faith.

After the pandemic, we need to go back to basics and then select what is best and most practical (and affordable) for our students' education. Here are some thoughts about how to review what is offered in our island schools.

### **Primary Schools**

1. Ensure religious, spiritual and civic education.
2. Provide core subjects including English and Pacific languages, maths (practical maths), science (including environmental and climate studies), and humanities.
3. Offer three days of school each week and one day dedicated to community related service, an attachment, sports, recreation, arts, dance and/or music.
4. Offer one day of agriculture, marine studies, entrepreneurial studies and traditional crafts through mentoring and hands-on approaches. These two 'practical days' should be based at school.

Children also need time for games, fun, social skills, family values and moral studies, for which even a half day on Thursday and Friday could be considered.

### **Secondary Schools**

The secondary school curriculum should include the subjects mentioned above as well as good governance, commerce, information technology, engineering, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, motor mechanics, agriculture and/or marine studies. Students could have options.

Schools should also consider holding four days of schooling and dedicating one day to culture, dance, carving, recreation, civic duty, and hands-on activities.

Other offered activities could include a Duke of Edinburgh (DOE) type programme incorporating survival skills, trekking, sailing, navigation, endurance, map reading, volunteering and civic duty. For senior secondary students this could include a work attachment or volunteer programme for which students could earn credit points for their end-of-education certificate.

Let us think about a very practical and innovative approach to learning from here on.

*About the Author*

Maniue Vilsoni taught on the island of Rotuma at primary and secondary school from 1981–1996, then again from 1999–2000 (having been on study leave at USP from 1997–1998). He then transferred to Marist Brothers' High School (2001–2003) and later taught at the Fiji College of Advanced Education (2004–June 2007). Today, he teaches in the city of Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates and has accompanied students on desert treks and camps in Sharjah, paddled through the mangrove sanctuary in Ras Al Khaimah, and travelled with his students to France and England. He also plays veterans' rugby, coaches, referees and commentates in the UAE, and has toured Bahrain, Hungary, Kuwait, Oman, Thailand and Qatar.

# Innovate Education – Nature as Teacher

*Ann Kloulechad-Singeo*



In Palau, wisdom is *“llomes el reng.”* Directly translated, it means *“light in the heart.”* Related to this is a Palauan proverb, *“a rengud odab,”* which means that the head has information and knowledge that need to be assessed by the heart to determine how best to deliver it, when and where, for effectiveness, appropriateness and wise decision making. This information is critical to being a Palauan and a Pacific Islander, where communities are small, everyone is interconnected, and relationship is everything. This ethos means that the art of language becomes a critical skill to be developed.

In this worldview we teach our children to maintain harmony not only with others, but also with nature. We anticipate a backlash from anything we treat with disrespect, and that includes nature. Nature does not belong to us but supports us, teaches us, and gives us life. It is its own entity and disrespecting it violates that relationship, and the backlash can be devastating. All of this is nested in the language and the culture born from our environment.

This is how we teach at the Ebiil Environmental Studies Programme. We teach science through the Palauan language and culture, and embedded in the instructions are words that describe the fragile relationship that must be respected and balanced in order to create harmony. For example, in a taro patch during cultivation, we use terms such as *“feeding the soil”* for fertilising; or *“do not disturb the sleeping Earth”* when working beyond sunset; or *“respect the ocean, it shows you ways to get your food”* when we go out to sea. When we teach watershed or marine ecology, we integrate livelihood knowledge and

practices that embrace this conservation-centred sensitivity to the land and ocean.

Our environmental education approach teaches the child to understand the ecology of the specific habitat and a way to use the resource in a mindful manner. Teaching children ecology makes them better understand the ecosystem service of each element of flora or fauna – so, for example, they learn that even logs or rocks contribute to a healthy and balanced nature. To further their understanding, we teach students traditional industries that embrace protection and conservation of the natural resources they depend on for their life. We create student and nature interactive classes that turn science into fun and exploratory learning. The students learn in teams and that promotes group decision making that requires the art of language and results that are best for everyone.

With the available technology, we can expand these ideas to a global scale and students can learn anywhere through live-streaming methods of communication. This means that children have an even greater opportunity for experiential learning about others' worlds and cultures, habitats and biodiversity, their threats and ways to protect them. We can take students into the forests in Palau, to Fiji, to the Amazon, to Africa, etc. Likewise, we can dive into the ocean waters of the Pacific, into the Americas, South Africa, and so on. The learning sites are endless, and the experience can be real-time and thus more engaging. The learning opportunities are now simply limited by our own imaginations, because the tools and knowledge are there; we just have to turn them on.

This moment with the COVID-19 pandemic gives us an opportunity to innovate and take education outside of the four-walled rooms, accessing unlimited

***“In Palau, wisdom is “llomes el reng.” Directly translated, it means “light in the heart.” Related to this is a Palauan proverb, “a rengud odab,” which means that the head has information and knowledge that need to be assessed by the heart to determine how best to deliver it, when and where... In this worldview we teach our children to maintain harmony not only with others, but also with nature. ”***

educational resources. This will only happen if we accept what is happening, learn from it, recognise the opportunities this experience presents, and innovate. Otherwise, we will spend resources trying to go back to where we were and miss a great opportunity to become better.

### ***About the Author***

Ann Kloulechad-Singeo became the Executive Director of Ebiil Society Inc. in January 2011. She is a co-founder of the Ebiil Society and served on the Board of Directors from 2007–2010. A graduate of University of Texas at El Paso with a Master of Arts in Communications for Social Change, she works with communities to initiate innovative solutions that promote sustainable resources for livelihood support. She has diverse work experience including various management positions, such as Executive Director for Palau Primary Health Care, Chief for Palau’s Gender Division, and as a private consultant in Palau and in the Pacific region. Recent publications include the UNESCO-EIU award-winning monograph, *Camp Ebiil: Cultivating Indigenous Knowledge towards Environmental Conservation*; *Palau Cultural Mapping* with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community; and, with UNESCO, *Palau Knowledge of the Sea*, *Palau Mesei Epistemology*, *Palau Intangible Cultural Heritage*, and *Palau Architectural Knowledge*. As the first Executive Director for Ebiil, she has devoted herself to the development of Ebiil Society as an environmental education medium for both local and international children and students, and as a community-based organisation that creates opportunities for communities to take charge of their environmental issues and challenges and to drive solutions for restoration and sustainability.





## “The Rotuman Tefui”

Photo Credit: Wilfer Rigamoto



# Re-grounding Theological Education to be Practical and Liberating

*Geraldine Varea Wiliame*



COVID-19 is a global pandemic that many commentators have called ‘a hidden enemy,’ an ‘ecological crisis’ or a ‘transformational moment.’ On the one hand, its impacts have caused much disruption to human life. On the other hand, COVID-19 redefines and reframes reality, presenting an *alter-native* worldview that opens new ways of seeing and doing things.

My vision for Oceania in the Post-COVID pandemic is for theological education to be both theoretical and practical. This vision is framed by the *Tefui* philosophy. The *Tefui* philosophy is guided by three life principles: Firstly, *Tefui* upholds a holistic and cyclical way of living, reminding us that life is transitional yet practical. Secondly, *Tefui* advocates spaces. These spaces embrace both complementarities and opposites as part of the process. This reminds us that relationship exists because there is always a *valued-space* for another. Thirdly, *Tefui* encompasses both centre and margin. There is no static centre or margin, but rather a *shifting* centre and margin. The centre and margin act as a *prism* to each other.

In Oceania, these three principles of life are grounded in our *people*, *nature* and *God*. These principles guide our *‘inea* (knowledge and understanding), our *poto* (cleverness), our *‘atmai* (wisdom) and our *aga* (manners and moral values of respect, compassion, etc.) as a way of life. This philosophy invites us not merely to *rethink* our relationship towards people, nature and God, but also to *value*, *uphold* and *embrace* people, nature and God as part of this life and the

generations to come. It sees people as *equals*, who are part of the community irrespective of gender, ethnicity and religion. It is time to turn away from what is hampering our relationships with each other, and start strengthening the moral values that hold us together as a human family. Based on these three principles of the *Tefui* philosophy of education, the following model, policy framework and strategies are to be considered in the review and design of theological education in Oceania.

The *Tefui* model of theological education has four components: (a) *Sakiroa* (observation) aims to locate and identify the interests and needs of our students and community, and ensures gender balance, ethnicity and ecumenical cooperation. (b) *Ma'op'akia* (gathering) involves the collection of information and data, planning and analysis. (c) *Fui'akia* (interweaving) aims to integrate indigenous knowledge and epistemologies (knowledge-based) and Western models with multiple fields of studies. And (d) *Hen'akia* (implementation) aims to translate theories into practical life-skills and moral lifestyles. These four components are transitional, a continuous process.

The policy framework for a *Tefui* model of theological education has four interrelated phases: (a) the foundational phase, which involves locating, engaging and identifying resource people such as researchers, policymakers and stakeholders in the process of creating policies. It also consists of the aims and outcomes, and the targeted people for whom these policies are designed; (b) the research phase, which involves the collection of information and data, and produces materials for conceptualisation, creative thinking, analysis, synthesising and publishing; (c) the translational phase, which is the interplay of theory and practice, where the former informs strategies and vice versa; (d) the institutional phase, which looks at revising and updating policies, documentation, monitoring and evaluation. Note, however, that the process does not end with the completion of the fourth phase. It goes back to the initial phase, and the learning cycle starts again but at different levels, stages and depths.

There are three implementation strategies proposed below, while recognising that there are also other equally valid strategies which are relevant to particular cultural and educational contexts.

- Theological education curriculum must be more practically based, where aspiring future ministers address and experience real-life situations outside the safety cocoon of the theological college. In this New Normal, students can experience a more hands-on leadership role at the college and not just

be passive students in the lecture rooms. This initiative and redesigning of the syllabus will help shape and sharpen the overall curriculum of the college and the church as a whole.

- There are theses written by students every year, and they have included well-thought-out recommendations to be implemented. Nevertheless, they are kept in libraries for research. In this New Normal, the theses can be completed in two stages: one, an academic component; and two, a practical component where students conduct seminars or workshops, and create projects in the community. A feedback and recording of the thesis via camera, newspaper, newsletter, etc. will be more beneficial than having the thesis merely marked and filed away to accumulate dust. It is important that the knowledge gathered is circulated; otherwise the research is wasted.
- Churches and theological schools in Oceania must allow and promote the ordination of women in the church. In the Old Normal, many churches have not allowed women to be ordained, a decision which is perhaps shaped by their social and cultural location. However, in the New Normal theological educators are invited to *rethink and reposition* our theological education in such a way that it gives spaces to women and youths to be ordained.

Implementing these recommendations will take courage, as we are challenged to depart from our comfort zones and old familiarities. In the process of moving on and being productive in new ways, the old vulnerabilities, fears, challenges and risks come to mind and can be self-defeating, if one is not spiritually ready to start anew. We may be locked-down, squeezed in our own individual spaces, and keep social distancing during this pandemic, but the beauty is that our New Normal calls every islander not merely to *create, build* and *weave* this New Normal into every aspect of life in Oceania, but to rethink the Old Normal theological educational model which we have inherited in our own Pacific islands.

#### ***About the author***

Rev. Geraldine Varea Wiliame is from the island of Rotuma. She is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church in Fiji and currently serves as a lecturer at Davuilevu Theological College. She graduated with a Masters in Theology degree in Biblical Studies from the Pacific Theological College in 2017. Theological education is her passion, and underpins much of her pastoral work with the parishes and communities which she has served as a minister.

## Rakoa Aga – Cultural Education

*Joshua Vincent Olsen Sopapelu Tarterani*



Our unique cultures have been with us as carriers of the mana that we lived through our experiences in time. Living our culture can be fascinating and can also be boring in these modern and fictitious times. The need to educate arises when we go back in time to the simple and hardworking methodologies of our ancestors. We need to adopt a lenient way of learning and at a pace that is not dictated by time but by our own learning processes, after COVID-19.

The need to adopt simple and effective methodologies in cultural education must be led by our parents, leaders, churches and elders. The focus on popularity and fame amongst scholars in our knowledge-based institutions should be secondary. Let us re-educate our youngsters in a decolonised manner where education is free of charge to a child and the learners are not forced to be educated because it is trendy.

I write as a young practical teacher to share my vision and to highlight approaches that can help to revitalise the so-called “endangered” cultures for



the future. This approach is highlighted through a visual and narrative description of the different parts of the *hefau* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), a totem tree that grows along the foreshore of Malha’a, where I come from, in Rotuma.

The parts of the *hefau* tree play pivotal roles in the Pasifiki region, and indicate the need for cultural education amid extreme climate change impacts, health pandemics and other socio-economic problems. Presented below are the descriptions of the parts of the *hefau* tree.

*Va'a (roots):* For the *hefau* to grow well and succeed in cultural education, children must spend time to read their own translated Bibles in their own languages and nourish their spirituality. A person does not know what the future holds, so seeking spiritual guidance will harness the learning mindset of a youngster to progressively mature. We cannot forget that formal education was established by the missionaries in the past, and that the church still plays a significant role in spiritual formation. We learn about our spirituality and cultural roots through the church functions we attend and the cultural interactions we associate with. These are spaces for youths to learn how to prepare the *koua* (earth oven), *fekei* (delicacy) and much more. These can be relearned where they have been forgotten.

We need to base our cultural education on the main root of culture, which is the land. Knowledge based on researchers or records taken by early settlers is biased because these accounts were written to suit their own pursuits or agendas. In order to counter this biased history, I strongly believe that, as parents, it is always best to keep in touch with your homeland. To all Fijians who are ethnic Rotumans, it is very important that you take your children for a visit to the island, especially during Christmas time. This will help to develop them to know their culture, learn their own language, and have a connection with their roots in the land, as an indigenous citizen and not as a tourist.

On a different note, *va'a* or culture starts in the *kaunohoga* (the family). Parents or guardians should know that learning starts at home and they must teach their children to practice culture at home. For example, they must teach them to understand and speak their mother tongue at home. This must be done well and, as much as possible, we must teach children to spend time doing their chores, as these are practical ways to keep one's culture alive. This is far more important than allowing our young to become anti-social and addicted to their video games or social media gadgets. At times we practice a form of 'social distancing' by connecting with the wider world online while neglecting our families and the *va'a* (relational space) of culture and faith.

Hūn heta (*stem*): It needs a communal effort for the people to practice their cultural values. This will sustain the culture and the moral values that are needed to nurture the *hefau* tree. We often hear the saying “manners make a man.” This is seen metaphorically in the stem, because it holds the *hefau* tree upright. We need to teach our children good manners and to be disciplined and respectful of persons and nature.

The use of magic words such as ‘thank you,’ ‘please’ and ‘excuse me’ have grown scarce in our society nowadays. This loss of respect shown by some youth to elders is worsened by the fact that our cultural ways have been replaced by an increasing Western-imported focus on individuality. Parents need to teach their children respect. Remember, we are doing this for the future of our children, and in turn their children. We must teach our children to be proud of their culture, even in a multicultural society like Fiji.

The bottom line is for parents, guardians and elders of our diverse cultural groups in Fiji to keep mentoring and encouraging our youngsters. Immediate action should be taken to correct them when their behaviour is disrespectful. If parents are open about the struggles and hardships of the past, and also about the opportunities they have had to become culturally responsible adults, this will encourage their children. Also, parents should be good listeners and act on their children’s expressed needs, which will help them to understand, for example, how their children are being marginalised in the wider society. This will surely do wonders in mentoring children to be “the way the world should be.” This is the soft approach to educating our youngsters about their culture and way of life.

Ra (*branches*): During COVID-19 we managed to globally connect through online platforms. These platforms are new to the older generations, and they only hesitantly gave time and space to the younger generations to celebrate their unique cultures using online platforms. Where face-to-face modes of learning are possible, then arts and crafts can be implemented with the guidance of an artist. The power of questioning is important in this process. We the adults and older people need to transfer our knowledge to young people. We should also let them choose the different aspects of the culture which most interest them – for instance: clothing and decorative arts, celebrations, language, food and religion. Let them choose what they are eager to learn from a particular speciality and allow room for them to ask questions about the meaning of these things in our cultures.

This questioning environment and a broad, tailored sharing of knowledge to different youngsters is a positive approach to cultural learning. This approach will allow room for our youth to master their own speciality and take ownership of their own culture. Hence, they will excel in the revitalisation process of our cultures, rather than learning only through academic research (a foreign way of learning), which may overload their minds. At the same time, youth need to freely involve themselves in cultural learning without compulsion. Their minds and thoughts should not be following a framework outlined by a foreigner, especially white supremacists. They should have a decolonisation mindset towards cultural learning.

*Rāu ‘āi (leaves)*: The food making process for the *hefau* tree is very crucial, especially considering the time and effort needed. Metaphorically, this is about helping to organise the education system and select the right tools to be used to describe and revitalise the culture. I fervently believe that apart from training facilitators, we should consider using our own retired teachers who have taught culture for 20–30 years. These people have been teaching the vernacular in school, so their shared experience should be considered in the delivery of quality cultural education.

Our elders on the island of Rotuma can themselves gradually come to use online platforms for educational purposes related to particular aspects of the culture. We should hear from people who are still around us and try to connect with them. This is a local approach where we rely on our own experts, rather than learning from old writings or archaic artefacts preserved in our museums. At the same time, the principles, stories and wisdom that parents and elders impart to children will become stagnant unless the learnings are sustained over time. There must be a continuous, sustained learning of the culture.

***“It is my vision to see a progressive learning of Pasifiki cultures within the region, within our own means and from our own elders. We should not be reliant on colonialism-based knowledge systems. ”***

There have been ongoing cases of cultural inappropriateness in our communities from time to time. This is the main reason why we need to avoid short-cuts in cultural education. It is understandable that in times of crisis such as the current

pandemic, we must improvise resources and consider economic impacts such as the cost of living. That is why we should consult our local experts on our time-tested cultural responses to crises. They will also need to explain why some cultural practices are irrelevant today and can be done away with. Let us relearn our culture in ways that are affordable, accessible and available at the right place in the right time. This will only happen if our youth understand that we need such learning because of the crisis we are in. During such times, we can look at some cultural traditions that we do without, improvise some practices, and learn from our local experts, educators, elders and, most importantly, parents and guardians.

Hue (*fruits*): “The fruit does not fall far from the tree” is a popular saying. The *hefau* fruit is very hard and can withstand harsh weather conditions. This symbolises good fortune at the end of a very successful cultural education. The nut inside the *hefau* fruit is medicinal. If the local expert approach is carried out well, then all the other social problems in society will be solved. This is because children will be occupied with learning something that can curb burglary, drug abuse, delinquency, truancy, early school dropouts and teenage pregnancy. Youngsters who are self-conscious and are culturally equipped will be mature enough to ‘Say No’ to behaviours that are detrimental to their wellbeing and that of their communities. This is the test to gauge whether our learning process is fruitful or not. Normally, our examinations are classroom-based. But let us be flexible. Perhaps at times we may need to send our youth into a totally new place for a short period of time, with distant relatives who are well versed in our culture. This will push them to their limits and to practice what they have been taught in their homes and other cultural education settings. This will in turn help with the learning of their distant cousins or relatives. This ‘examination’ approach is not about marks. It will be either a ‘pass’ or ‘let’s try again.’

Hosa (*flowers*): The flowering time for the *hefau* trees is usually from Christmas to New Year. In the Pasifiki region this is a special time for festivities. In terms of cultural education, this is the prime time when children beautify their surroundings with their knowledge acquired throughout the year of cultural learning from their homes and elsewhere. This festive approach also brings children out to mingle and engage in self-learning about new trends and important cultural aspects. As a Rotuman, this is the *fara* season, where only youngsters interactively go in groups and perform cultural items, learning how to dance, sing songs, renew friendship bonding, and strengthen kinship ties.

The white flowers of the *hefau* symbolise the purity of our culture. During the learning process we should always have a pure heart. This is important in performing or practicing a cultural imperative and is found in most hierarchical social structures. Chiefly titles, wealth, prestige or academic qualifications will not earn you a place in the hearts of other kinspeople if you do not live out your cultural values and practices. The key point is that one needs to be the flower that has ascribed lineages and developed linkages to one's culture. One must always have the heart, knowledge and skill of giving the flower back to the community. The flower is to help with the mentoring of the youth of today and the future.

All of the parts of the *hefau* tree need to work in unison to withstand the insecurities, pandemics, natural and other hazards, and to maintain a harmonious multicultural society. It is my vision to see a progressive learning of Pasifiki cultures within the region, within our own means and from our own elders. We should not be reliant on colonialism-based knowledge systems. It is the parents' or guardians' role to educate the child in a flexible way and to be selective concerning the essential aspects of our culture that we need to learn – arts and crafts, language, food, celebrations and religion.

Change is inevitable, but we should not change what our *mapigas* (grannies) taught us. And like the *hefau* tree, we should continue to help those who are vulnerable in the community. In this case, we must help the young to be aware, understand and live out the six unique approaches gleaned from the *hefau* tree highlighted above. *Rakoa Aga* (cultural education) can take place if these approaches are taught to our youngsters from childhood. They can then become role models in society and sustain our culture. If we need money to be the *va'a* to start or accommodate cultural education, then we are commodifying our own unique culture that was gifted to us with mana from God. Through our 'local experts' approach to education, we take ownership of our cultural education. A Rotuman saying goes like this: "Hia' ra heta ma hia' la fa'" ('when you sit on the branch, make sure you break the branch'). The application here is that in educating our children about our culture, we ensure that we never lose hope, and that we master the cultural aspects that create a better life for the learners.

### ***About the Author***

Joshua Vincent Olsen Sopapelu Tarterani is 24 years of age and hails from the district of Malha'a, Rotuma. He is a culture activist, currently a primary school teacher by profession, and has a BA in Environmental Management. He loves socialising, singing and dancing, and is passionate about doing community work and anything to do with the Rotuman culture.



# DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMICS, HEALTH, GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT

## **Development for Wellbeing, Sustainable and Resilient Pacific**

*Jack Urame*



COVID-19 has challenged the conventional world order and exposed the fragility of modern civilisation, scientific progress, technological innovations, mega development structures and the dominant capitalist system. When the system that holds the mega structures together is struck by the pandemic, a chain reaction takes place and everything wobbles. We see the ugly side of capitalism and realise that humanity's dependence on the dominant ideology, driven by the desire for more money and wealth, cannot sustain our survival. We are convinced by the COVID-19 crisis that the current world order cannot satisfy our search for justice, peace, freedom, health, equality and happiness. The impact of COVID-19 has touched every aspect of our lives, and the world will never be the same again.

Therefore, we must re-imagine a different world order that can sustain our survival. We need a system that promotes resilience and sustainability. Our subsistence system is a viable means for Oceania. We need to shift from the conventional capitalist system to our subsistence system, which is very much connected with the natural environment and people. The land, sea, forest, rivers, our village communities and our social networks are the sources of our strength and livelihood. We must reclaim those basics to sustain our wellbeing and to promote equality, justice, peace and freedom. Our Pacific economic system of wellbeing is grounded in the values of community, relationship, subsistence production and stewardship of our environment. It is about living together, sharing and caring for each other, and living in harmony with the natural creation.

The wisdom of our rich traditions does not suppress and enslave us but strengthens and guides us to live sustainably and harmoniously with God's creation. When we are connected to our natural world, when we care for, protect and use it sustainably, we are liberated from our entrapment in a foreign system based on greed. Our traditional ways of using our natural resources do not require sophisticated high-tech tools, so they do not do massive destruction to the environment God has provided for us. Our traditional practices of using our environment do not contribute to massive destruction but preserve the ecological order. In this way, our rich flora and fauna quickly recuperate from crises and maintain the natural balance of the ecosystem. Therefore, our traditional wisdom and practices of stewardship should guide us in our development and economic ventures in the region.

Our subsistence system is the foundation of our survival. It is not externally controlled or dictated but managed locally by our people. It is people-oriented and not money-oriented. It is driven by the values of family and community needs and fosters relationships between people. People organise their families and communities and decide when to plant, fish, harvest, exchange, consume and generously share or exchange with each other. In our Pacific Way, when food is produced it is shared among people, thus strengthening social bonds and the resilience of communities.

***“I envisage a Pacific region where the dynamics of our economic subsistence, ecological stewardship, cultural foundations and social systems remain a viable means of sustaining our wellbeing and shaping our future.”***

By re-embracing this way of life, if the neoliberal capitalist system collapses people can still rely on the subsistence system and survive. They can still plant and harvest, hunt and fish, collect wood from the forest to burn for cooking, construct houses or canoes, and obtain plants or animals for food and health. This is a sustainable and reliable system.

This subsistence system is connected to ecological, social and cultural systems, thus providing the basis of our survival. Our food, water, oxygen, health, shelter and security that sustain our wellbeing come through these interconnected systems. Our history informs us that our ancestors survived through respecting these systems over many centuries, and we can still rely on them today. Therefore, I envisage a Pacific region that is free from pollution of the sea, water and air, free from excessive depletion of our forests, free from excessive mining and fishing, free from excessive use of our land for industrial purposes, and free from destruction to the ecological order. One of our development curses is dependency, and in that respect I envisage a shift from dependency on foreign ideologies, systems and models to self-determination in development, and from money and a material-oriented lifestyle to a people-oriented and ecological-oriented lifestyle.

After COVID-19, we the people of Oceania must become less dependent on the dominant neoliberal capitalist system and re-invigorate our responsibility of stewardship for the natural environment, our social and cultural traditions, and our indigenous wisdom, philosophies and systems to shape our present and guide our future. I envisage a Pacific region where the dynamics of our economic subsistence, ecological stewardship, cultural foundations and social systems remain a viable means of sustaining our wellbeing and shaping our future. This mode of life will liberate us from the unjust oppressive capitalist system of the modern world which creates so much injustice and suffering.

#### ***About the Author***

Rt. Rev. Dr. Jack Urame is the Head Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. He holds a PhD in Social Sciences. He served as a missionary in Germany and as a social researcher at the Melanesian Institute in Papua New Guinea. He was the Director of the same Institute before becoming Bishop.

# Weaving New Development Paths for the Pacific

*Tarcisius Kabutaulaka*



The COVID-19 pandemic is taking a toll on human societies worldwide. It affects all of us, whether you live in New York or in a rural village in the Pacific Islands. However, the nature, intensity and scale of the impacts vary. At the time of writing, nearly 11 million people worldwide have contracted the coronavirus, and there have been over 500,000 fatalities. Even the United States, the self-proclaimed “world power” with advanced technologies and health services, has been brought to its knees. The U.S. has become the epicentre of the infection, with more than 2.8 million confirmed cases and over 130,000 deaths as of early July, 2020. No COVID-19 vaccination has yet been found and the infections and fatalities are expected to increase exponentially.

The virus has also engendered a global economic recession. Trade is expected to fall by between 13% and 32% in 2020, as ‘normal’ life and economic activities are disrupted. According to the United Nations, up to 25 million jobs will be lost worldwide. This is therefore not just a health crisis; it is also an economic and labour market crisis.

This pandemic caught many countries with their proverbial pants down or their *lavalava* untied, exposing the flaws and vulnerabilities of modern civilisation, especially the ideologies and structures that have long influenced human imaginations, aspirations, and the ways in which the world is organised. Central to this is the idea of ‘economic development’ that normalises an insatiable addiction for infinite growth built on the unbridled extraction and destruction

of natural resources. In our quest for economic growth, we are destroying our environment and planet. We have arrogantly asserted ourselves as the masters of the planet, rather than belonging to and being part of it. We have been terrible citizens of earth. Although we consider ourselves to be the most intelligent residents of this planet, it is obvious that we do not fully understand nature's powers and when and how they can be unleashed.

The virus also reveals the failure of government policies and programmes that focus on building the might of militaries rather than the wellbeing of peoples. Some may dismiss this view as naïve because they believe nation-states must have strong militaries. But it took a virus, not military might, to render the most powerful military forces in the world useless. This illustrates the need for us to proactively rethink the focus and trajectories of human civilisation. The current crisis has exposed the vulnerabilities of global interconnections and highlighted perceptions that being placed at the margins of state and global influence are the safest places to be during a pandemic.

As of June 2020, twelve countries had no confirmed case of coronavirus.<sup>47</sup> Ten of these are Pacific island nations: Nauru, Tuvalu, Palau, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Pacific nations' defence against the virus was their geographical status as islands, which isolates them from large populations, major migration routes, and the centres of global trade. These characteristics of island countries that were previously seen as economic vulnerabilities became their fortress during the pandemic.

In many of the Pacific island countries, people were encouraged to return to their rural home villages and practice subsistence agriculture. In Solomon Islands, for example, the government declared a state of emergency in late March 2020 and provided funding to hire ships to take people back to their home islands and villages, triggering mass migrations from the national capital Honiara to rural areas as people attempted to 'escape' the virus. Villages were portrayed as 'safe havens' because of their relative isolation.<sup>48</sup> It is ironic that after decades

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47 This is largely self-declared and some have raised voices of skepticism, especially in relation to countries like North Korea and Turkmenistan.

48 There were similar trends elsewhere in the world. In India, for example, the BBC reported that "streets around the Indian capital Delhi have been filled with people walking to reach their villages in neighbouring states" (*BBC News* 30 March 2020).

of promoting globalisation, we are now seeking refuge in places as isolated as possible from the rest of the world. Paradoxically, these are also places where social services, such as health and education, are at best inadequate and at worse non-existent.

At the global level, one of the positive impacts of COVID-19 has been the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions because factories have closed and transportation decreased. This has given the planet an opportunity to breathe. The question is whether this will continue after the virus is brought under control, or whether we will see a surge in greenhouse gas emissions as states and corporations rush to restart their operations to rebuild their profit margins.

This pandemic has given us the opportunity to reflect and learn. Apart from the lessons in medical science, there are also socio-economic and political lessons. If we do not learn from this crisis and change the way we do things, the future will bring more and greater tragedies. This is the time to pause and learn from the virus so that we can weave new paths for the future – a New Normal. While we focus on preventing COVID-19 from reaching our shores, it is equally important to proactively think about and plan for what our Oceania region should look like after this virus has been controlled.

We cannot afford to go back to the way things were prior to COVID-19. It is untenable and dangerous. The pandemic has given us the opportunity to critique ideas, assumptions, values, processes, structures and issues that have long influenced our societies. Right now, the mantra amongst some people is to go

***“We cannot afford to go back to the way things were prior to COVID-19. It is untenable and dangerous... it has been a ‘normalising’ of environmental and cultural destruction, greed, an insatiable addiction to economic growth models and political mismanagement. There is nothing ‘normal’ about an economic system that is overly dependent on industries that destroy our environment and exacerbate climate change-induced disasters that destroy our planet. There is nothing ‘normal’ about the fact that most of our people are marginalised by an economic system built on corporate greed and affluence rather than people-centred investment activities. ”***

back to the pre-COVID-19 ‘normal’ – to continue with unsustainable economic development practices, build crowded urban centres, and use educational curricula that privilege and celebrate these destructive ideas and practices. But there is nothing ‘normal’ about that economic development approach. Rather, it has been a ‘normalising’ of environmental and cultural destruction, greed, an insatiable addiction to economic growth models and political mismanagement. There is nothing ‘normal’ about an economic system that is overly dependent on industries that destroy our environment and exacerbate climate change-induced disasters that destroy our planet. There is nothing ‘normal’ about the fact that most of our people are marginalised by an economic system built on corporate greed and affluence rather than people-centred investment activities.

What we had prior to COVID-19 was not ‘normal.’ Consequently, in the post-COVID-19 era we must build a New Normal for Oceania – a new social and ecological reality. In order to create this new reality, there is a need for deeper conversations and reflections, especially about ‘development’ – that pervasive yet ambiguous concept that has dominated global discourses and which is central to modern civilisation. Yet we rarely stop to think about its genealogies, assumptions, values and impacts.

Some may dismiss this as an abstract academic engagement. But it is worth noting that these ideas, assumptions and values ultimately inform and influence our countries’ and region’s development policies, processes and outcomes. We must therefore engage with them, and demand our leaders to have deep and substantive discussions about this. We have long been encouraged – and in some cases coerced – to follow the dominant neoliberal economic development model that focuses on economic growth built on unlimited extraction and consumption of finite natural resources. This poses an existential threat to our communities, islands, countries and planet. Yet we have unquestioningly continued to accept it.

In fact, this economic development model is relatively new, born in particular parts of the world and projected globally through imperial expansion projects. It is a hugely destructive set of ideas because its logic is one of wholesale transformation rather than adaptation or incorporation of appropriate institutions, practices, values and lifestyles. It asks individuals and societies to stop being what they are and have been, and to become something completely different. We need to ask if this is the development trajectory that Pacific peoples want or can afford. We must use this opportunity to proactively rethink and reset our

development agendas, values, goals, processes and trajectories. We must find our own development pathways.

Last year, Aotearoa/New Zealand passed a Wellbeing Budget 2019/20, which is based on gauging the long-term impact of policies on people's wellbeing, rather than on short-term measures. Of course Aotearoa is different from the smaller Pacific island countries. But the ideas that inform the wellbeing budget could be useful to us and worth learning from. Most importantly, in exploring and carving a new development path we can draw from and be informed by values and practices that have enabled our people to live sustainably in these islands for thousands of years. This is not about looking backwards. Rather, it is about creatively harnessing our people's experiences and values to build a better future.

Let us learn from COVID-19 and build a 'new reality' – a New Normal – a new development path that enhances our people's values and our island livelihoods.

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### ***About the Author***

Tarcisius Kabutaulaka currently lives in Honolulu, Hawai'i, where he tends a small vegetable garden at the back of Mānoa Valley. When he is not doing that, he works as Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Tarcisius was born and grew up in Tasimauro on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, and was educated in Solomon Islands, Fiji and Australia. He plans one day to return to Tasimauro, where he will plant and drink kava and have a pet dog named Covid.

# Flatten the Curve on Social and Economic Inequalities

*Emele Morgan*



In mid-January 2020, my mother-in-law and sister-in-law flew to Fiji from Brisbane, Australia. I asked them, partly fascinated, “what did they do to you at the airport?” They replied that they had had their temperatures taken as a screening for the COVID-19 virus at our international airport. As a long-time listener to BBC radio, I had been listening to what was happening in China, Italy and Spain and sometimes viewing the news on news channels on the internet. MSN was broadcasting clear and vividly troubling images from the other side of the world of the effects of the unbelievable rate and method of transmission of this new virus. I told my family, “this virus is going to come to Fiji, it’s going to come through the airport.” Friends who came home started to talk about food security, namely access to meat and vegetables, should the coronavirus reach our shores.

The events which followed were not just personal, as the whole country steeled itself, along with the rest of the world, against COVID-19. Leaders in Europe called the social and economic effects of the virus worse than the impact of World War II; and in America, some economists said it was worse than the Great Depression as millions became unemployed. More than 5,000 miles from China, in the Pacific, where we rely heavily on the tourism industry, jobs were lost in a matter of days. In Fiji, one in three people are either directly or indirectly employed by the tourism industry in a population that has yet to reach one million. The devastation of mass job losses in the country during the pandemic, with an added tropical cyclone hitting the country and destroying homes during

the lockdown period, was a stark reminder of our human vulnerability, not only to the forces of nature but to our reliance on those who have the power to affect the wellbeing of humanity.

COVID-19 reminds us that our world is interconnected and specific policies and conventions are likewise connected; each sector affects other seemingly unconnected sectors. A single virus transmitted through caged animals can cause as much economic and social devastation as a war. We have been reminded that it is those with ‘less’ who absorb the worst of the world’s problems, and that global funding needs to reflect the reality that health security is as important as military security.

It is time to ‘flatten the curve’ on social and economic inequalities that affect the weakest in our societies, with improved streamlined global social and economic policies and a reshaping of institutions, of the type Jeffrey Sachs, a leading expert on economic development and the eradication of poverty, explains in detail in his book *The End of Poverty* (2006), and in his scholarly articles and other books on economic reform strategies and climate change.

As I write today, there have been 16,162 deaths from COVID-19 in New York alone and 113, 824 deaths in the United States in total (WHO April 2020). The 9/11 attacks on New York had 2,977 fatalities by comparison (*Washington Post* 11 September 2013). I am not making light of any act of war or terrorism, or the loss of any single life for any reason, but highlighting the interwoven nature of global security. Environmental health and food security are critical to global stability.

In Oceania, we are aware that there is no ‘one-answer-fits-all’ solution for every country, and social and economic policies or systems must reflect this. The Pacific Ocean is part of our home and cultural identity. It is also a source of food and income. We grow up surrounded by the ocean on small islands, where it is only perhaps an hour’s drive on our larger islands before one arrives in hilly land areas considered ‘forest areas.’ Fiji and other Pacific island countries produce the lowest emissions of carbon, yet we pay the highest price with the effects of climate change on our countries. The people of Kiribati have had to migrate and seek refuge in Fiji as rising sea-levels are in the process of destroying their country. To add to that, the Pacific Ocean is being over-fished and exploited by the foreign owned billion-dollar tuna industry as tuna becomes depleted in the other great oceans of the world. Apart from this situation not making ecological sense (what will we eat when the fish are all gone?), there should be

more advanced methods of conducting business based on the most basic human values of care, mutual respect, and sustainability for our children's children.

Fiji's leading economist and academic, Wadan Narsey, has written publicly over the years on the need for necessary economic reform and development issues, stressing the fact that a solution that works well in another country may not work well in Fiji. Narsey has also emphasised the need to reassess the contribution women make to the economy, stressing that being viewed as 'not economically active' does not mean they are not contributing to the protection and progress of the household and are therefore contributing to making society functional (Narsey 8 March 2015). On a whole, there is much more that economic policies could do to value the contribution women make in raising sensible and responsible future generations.

We also grew up listening to Michael Jackson, Madonna, U2, Eric Clapton and Ed Sheeran, and along with our own local content on the radio we hummed along to The Beatles and Elton John. We watched ET, Star Wars, Jurassic World, Spiderman and James Bond movies while we sipped Coca-Cola and enjoyed the fizz of cold soft drinks as much as we enjoyed drinking sweet chilled coconut juice. At school in Fiji, like our parents, we learned facts about World War I and World War II, and three generations later our children continue to do the same. With deep respect for the fatalities of war, we understood the importance of the institutionalisation of human rights.

***“Following 2020 and the lessons of the coronavirus pandemic, I hope the nature of humanity’s multi-disciplinary weave of ‘connectedness’ will guide global policy and research, and that out of that an advanced global system will evolve that gives the ‘weakest’ elements of humanity the most attention and eventually becomes a New Normal.’ ”***

I understand that the circumstances of human beings have improved in many ways since the Industrial Revolution. Cars, for instance, enable us to travel further distances in shorter time spans. It made us smile a little when we

travelled abroad and discovered that there were those who did not know Fiji existed, while we knew about their countries while growing up. But we know this is changing gradually through the rapid advancement of all types of media and communication. Along the years, the mobile phone replaced the rotary telephone and push-button residential landlines with a phone that could now read documents, send e-mails and make videos of our children to send to relatives, replacing the bulky video camera, computer and post office with one small affordable gadget that could fit in our pockets. On reflecting about a vision for humanity's New Normal, it does seem as if the evolving advancements in technological knowledge need to be matched by the reshaping of global institutions and policies that protect our global security.

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## About the Author

Ms Emele Morgan is currently a post-graduate student at the University of the South Pacific, pursuing her interest in gender and development. In the past ten years, she has worked in the development sector in policy research and programme support roles and enjoys reading widely about issues and institutions that directly affect smaller countries and individual realities. Being a mum to three children, she hopes the future will be shaped more by the principles of social justice. She also enjoys music, cooking, and walks along the seaside.



## **“Where there is smoke, there’s a fire”**

The Pacific Islands have been through and have faced many disasters...but we are still here, we still survive, we still exist...inspired by the article Islands of Hope...

**Painting By Benjamin Dickson**

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# Islands of Hope – Vision for the Future of the Pacific Region

*Fe'iloakitau Kaho Tevi*



*“Some people are so poor all they have is money.” Bob Marley*

## **Herd mentality and island life**

There is no doubt that the initial herd response by Fijians to clearing out the shelves of supermarkets was a clear ‘off the hip’ reaction mostly by those who had the means. We made fun of the Australians and Americans hoarding toilet paper, but we were no different here in Fiji, with some of us having those same reactions. Fijians living in the rural areas went about their lives without much concern until the lockdown in Suva, the capital of Fiji. Supplies of agricultural goods were purchased at the edge of the lockdown areas and, while it took a few days to organise, the vendors were able to get their produce into the lockdown areas in Fiji.

The tourism industry, being the mainstay of Fiji’s economy, is drastically affected. About 85% of all hotels in Fiji have either closed or significantly reduced their staff as a result of COVID-19. Service providers to the hotels and hotel employees are at the front line of the economic ramifications of COVID-19. This has had significant impacts on those in the lower income bracket who live on a ‘paycheck to paycheck’ basis. The most recent termination of some 700 staff members of the national Fijian airline company, Fiji Airways, is yet

another blow to the already employment-stricken Fijian economy. This comes on the back of a 2018 financial year that Fiji Airways boasted to be its highest income in any given year.

Many of those employed in the tourism industry have gone back to planting and living off the land, either from their ‘backyard gardens’ or else they have returned to their villages to live and work their plantations. Interestingly, once the state of emergency was declared in the Solomon Islands, many of the city dwellers returned to their islands. In summary, the wealthy fell back on their savings as a result of the pandemic, and the not too financially comfortable fell back on their families, extended families, villages and plantations.

Here is an observation: Many countries that were ‘better off’ than others in the region prior to the pandemic are the ones most affected by COVID-19. What we see at present is that the island countries that were not too dependent on tourism are going about their lives without too much disruption, compared to those countries that have invested heavily in the tourism industry. One interesting policy decision by the government of Samoa was to close down the bigger supermarkets earlier in the day so that the smaller ‘grandmother and grandfather shops’ could benefit. This has led to a more equitable distribution of income in Samoa.

Surprisingly, many of the island countries have not been affected directly by the latest coronavirus pandemic. Tonga, Cook Islands, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Niue, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, RMI and Palau are all COVID-19 free! But despite this, these countries have implemented many of the preventive measures, including curfews and lockdowns. When economic activity has significantly decreased, many of these islanders have reverted back to island diets and island dishes to help them through these difficult times. There is some envy by city dwellers towards those who are able to live off the land (low to middle income families) as they (the urban population) no longer have the buying power now that their incomes are either curtailed, significantly reduced or halted.

Collective engagements to cater for the needs of families within clans have significantly increased. Families in Tonga have distributed their root crops freely in an effort to help those in need. A barter trade market on the internet is exploding in Fiji, where individuals are exchanging goods and services in trying to help each other fare through these difficult times. Many stories of communities helping individuals who are in difficulty are surfacing in our islands. In some sense, it is not surprising that our people react in this way, given our communal

way of living and our sense of caring for the other. In other words, there is not much social disruption in pivoting our societies to care for the neighbour and the community, as that is our *modus operandi*.

### **Colonial links to Behavioral Patterns**

In the 2019–2020 cyclone season, the Pacific region went through 12 tropical cyclones, 4 of which were Category 5 cyclones. In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, Tropical Cyclone Harold seriously affected 3 island countries, while causing heavy flooding and rainfall in several others. This Category 5 cyclone left destruction in its wake in the midst of the overwhelming sense of anxiety about COVID-19. There was a sense of ‘immunity’ to the effects of the cyclone when compared to how we are to deal with the ‘unknown’ factor of COVID-19. We know cyclones, but we do not know how to react to a pandemic called COVID-19.

**“This crisis reinforces what we have always known: the solutions to our hardships are to be found in our own plantations and villages rather than in the ‘generosity’ of international development banks and financing institutions. ”**

If one were to associate colonial histories with the manner in which assistance is given and received in the islands, our reaction to Tropical Cyclone Harold is a good example of ‘colonial reverberations,’ including our reactions to a colonial presence and psyche: we are dependent on foreign assistance to recover. The social behaviour towards the recovery from tropical cyclones is increasingly associated with our dependence on assistance given by overseas partners. We now have become so accustomed to external assistance that we wait for it; we also wait on government to assist in recovery; we wait on the church to help us, and so on. *We ‘wait’ for help from elsewhere.*

In contrast, our reactions to the pandemic thus far have been more localised, falling back on our strengths as Pacific Islanders – our values of reciprocity, communal living and subsistence. This crisis reinforces what we have always known: the solutions to our hardships are to be found in our own plantations and villages rather than in the ‘generosity’ of international development banks and financing institutions.

### **Where is My Church?**

Religious gatherings were significantly affected by preventative measures enforced by governments in response to the pandemic. Many Pacific Islanders had to deal with not going to church on Sunday, an act considered to be ‘back-sliding’ or, at worst, ‘a sin’ by many of our Pacific island communities. How do we go to church without *going* to church? In other words, how do I express my Christian faith when I am not allowed to worship in church? For the church institutions, the challenge has been to remain relevant, connected, and ‘with’ the people, while not being physically able to do so.

While many of the mainline denominations struggled with this challenge, some were able to use social media platforms to spiritually ‘be in touch’ with their communities. Now that the strict quarantine measures are slowly being lifted, it would be interesting to see how the mainline churches will integrate the learnings from the COVID-19 lockdown as tools for mission and outreach. In any event, it is clear that the nature of the church in the Pacific has shifted as a result of COVID-19. A commendable initiative has been a Methodist Church in Fiji high school in Suva, which transitioned their Forms 6 and 7 classes to online classes, using an online teaching and facilitation software programme. Such initiatives will surely place this school ahead of the pack in terms of pivoting towards a digital education base.

Has faith weakened in the process of this crisis? I would contend that the denominational, institutional expression of the church has been adversely affected to a large degree by COVID-19. Financially, the churches’ income has substantially decreased as a result of the cancellation of church services. This will have a delayed effect in parishes, circuits, provinces and other levels of the church, as they will not be able to generate sufficient annual income. Spiritually, many churchgoers will ask where their *talatalas* or *faifekaus* (ministers) were during the COVID-19 lockdown. Was there any attempt to contact and connect with the parishioners? Such questions will need careful consideration by the leaders of faith-based institutions when church services and other related meetings can be convened.

### **A Quest for Equality and Equity**

Rather than add to the already profound reflections on identifying drivers that heighten inequalities, I would like to position the debate around the elements we find in our communities that will add layers to a solution and to an alternative to the current economic and social structures that are being pushed and promoted by a capitalist driven market economy and culture.

A senior government official from one of the provinces in Papua New Guinea has noted how our Pacific communities were faring better than our sisters and brothers in developed countries. This is much to the surprise of many observers. For example, Fiji's medical infrastructure was able to cope well with the pandemic; by and large, our communities followed instructions well; and most Pacific island countries are implementing state of emergency rules despite the absence of coronavirus patients in their own countries.

Samoa had a dress rehearsal with the measles outbreak last year, such that when action was taken to lock down the country, reaction was generally more accepting of the imposition of the emergency decrees. In some bubbles in the Pacific countries, we found ourselves relating to the developed world and looking with envy at the medical structures available and how they were coping with this pandemic. We were so envious of the availability of technology and medical equipment at the disposal of these hospitals that we often heard our people say that if they were to become sick, they would prefer to be in Auckland, Los Angeles or New York rather than in Honiara, Port Vila or Suva.

Perhaps we are trying to superimpose a so-called 'developed world' reality on to our developing world. But we may be imposing the reality of human beings existing in an environment that is almost entirely dependent on Western medical systems to help people recover from disease. What we are coming to realise is that our geographic isolation and our resilient nature as Pacific Islanders may just be our saving grace in the face of this pandemic.

Lastly, the current rescue packages for many of our Pacific islands will only cater for the needs of their people until June, at the earliest. The access to limited funding of Pacific island countries will most likely take them to the doors of the international financial institutions, further pushing Pacific island countries into debt. Given that the latest estimates indicate a prolonged COVID-19 phase, it is only going to be a matter of time before funds are exhausted and there is a need for the island countries to identify additional financial sources to cover the management costs of COVID-19. Some island countries have adopted a 2-pronged approach to addressing the medium to longer term economic stresses. These are the promotion of local gardening and the consumption of local produce to cover for the decrease in the purchasing power of the general public.

Recent news clippings from New Zealand point towards the resumption of NZ-AUS trans-Tasman flights once both countries have brought their

COVID-19 cases down. To date, both Vanuatu and Fiji have officially lodged requests with the Australian and New Zealand authorities at the highest level to be included in the trans-Tasman bubble. Our capacity to deal with a potential outbreak in those

COVID-free Pacific Island countries is seen as the threshold for a discussion about an eventual inclusion in the trans-Tasman bubble.

**“Is it ‘normal’ that we continue to feed a globalised economic system that makes us a statistic on an import-export balance sheet of trade, in economic arrangements that do not recognise our very deep attachment, as a people, to the environment that we live in and are a part of? ”**

Our hope is that by the time our crops are ready for harvesting, we would have found a vaccine for COVID-19 and that we can attain some ‘normalcy’ in our lives. The term is in brackets as we are not too sure what ‘normal’ will look like. Is it ‘normal’ for Hawai’i to accept 30,000+ tourists every day? Is it ‘normal’ for Fiji to practically place all its eggs in one basket – the tourist industry – when it is now clear that this sector will not build resilience in our countries? Is it ‘normal’ for our countries not to open their borders for the free flow of goods and services when the flow seems to be going more in one direction than the other? Is it ‘normal’ that we continue to feed a globalised economic system that makes us a statistic on an import-export balance sheet of trade, in economic arrangements that do not recognise our very deep attachment, as a people, to the environment that we live in and are a part of? Is that the ‘normal’ we all want to get back to?

### **Pivoting for a Better Pacific Region**

There is an increasing chorus of voices that are calling for change, change that would bring the world we knew to a halt, to be replaced with another world – one with our environment and our people at the centre of our development and an economy that is at the service of this core focus. We need to go back to a model of society that places that human being at the centre of every economic, environmental and societal structure. Some of us would venture to state that

it is our indigenous peoples around the world who have the answers to this question about a model for the future. I would suggest that a global and equitable response model begins from the way in which indigenous communities have long been able to live in sync with their surroundings, their environment and their economy.

There has been a marked increase in the call for a change in our approach to development and to the type of economic structure we seek in our Pacific island countries. An increasing awareness of the inequalities of a capitalist driven economy is a conversation that can be heard in the streets and other places, much more so than in academic and NGO circles. When we are free from COVID-19, are we going back to the same type of society we had before? What are the changes we need to see in our islands?

### **The Vision: ‘Island of Hope’**

The vision of the Pacific as an Island of Hope that was presented in 2001 offered a comprehensive and thorough rebuttal of the onslaught of economic globalisation. Do we have the choice, or should we just become part of the globalised economy – recipients of income ‘crumbs’ and providers of goods and services to the global market? The bleak observations about the dominant neoliberal economic system are starkly relevant for today. The prevailing economic model globalises trade and centralises all exchanges of goods and assets to be profit-driven. COVID-19 has shown us the very weaknesses of this model and the negative consequences for our people. This is an economic model and accompanying societal structure that is flawed at the core and incompatible with our cultures and values.

The vision of the Island of Hope is partly visionary and partly real, as its values are lived on a daily basis in many households and families in the Pacific today. As clearly stated, the vision of the Island Hope was a response to economic globalisation; it was a message of hope to the people of the Pacific to hold on to the core values that shape their identity as people of the Pacific Ocean. As this vision’s founding document stated:

The concept of the Island of Hope is not merely a dream. It is founded in reality; the institutions and values embedded in the Island of Hope may not create wealth on a massive scale, but they will never be responsible for creating second-class citizens, destroying the environment at will, causing poverty, the debasement of humanity and denial of human dignity,

as economic globalisation is doing. The Island of Hope will never entail economic tyranny (WCC 2001:114-115).

***“The institutions and values embedded in the Island of Hope may not create wealth on a massive scale, but they will never be responsible for creating second-class citizens, destroying the environment at will, causing poverty, the debasement of humanity and denial of human dignity, as economic globalisation is doing. The Island of Hope will never entail economic tyranny.”***

The Island of Hope document further commented: “Spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect are components of the Island of Hope which prioritise relationships, celebrate quality of life, and value human beings and creation over the production of things. The Island of Hope is an alternative to the project of economic globalisation which entails domination through unjust economic systems” (WCC 2001:130). Drawing on this set of core values as proposed by the vision of the Island of Hope, may I propose four building blocks that the Pacific region may wish to entertain:

### **1. COVID-free Travel/Trade Pacific Zone**

Discussions in the Pacific region propose a resumption of flights from New Zealand to the Pacific Island countries that are COVID-free. In this scenario, once again, we have to wait for Australia and New Zealand to create their bubble before we are invited to join. While this may be driven by the need to address the dire state of the tourism sector in our Pacific island countries, there are untapped opportunities and potentially mutual economic income that can be gained, opportunities nurtured and/or momentum created through a horizontal opening up of international flights between COVID-free Pacific Island countries. Such flights can begin to move people, goods and services between Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji (when COVID-free), Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, RMI, and Cook Islands. This will create a windfall of income for airline companies that do not have to implement the social distancing policy on intra-COVID-free countries. There will be stringent medical certifications needed prior to travel and at gates of departure to ensure that passengers are COVID-19-free and do not carry any of the symptoms. This option ticks all the boxes that align with the call for

greater solidarity amongst Pacific island countries, and for regional collaboration to beat COVID-19.

## **2. Social Models that Reflect our Cultures and Regions**

One of the main contentious issues around a future economic model is how it deals with the diverse cultures in our region. Many prescribed economic models promoted by international financing institutions have disregarded the contributions that culture makes to the coherence and stability of traditional indigenous economic models. Any future economic model must place culture at the core of its principles and values so that economic policies, social dynamics and processes are aligned to the core identity of Pacific Islanders and their culture.

One clear example of this mechanism is the Facebook page created by a group of Fijian entrepreneurs who are seeking a way to build an economy on the principles of reciprocity, care and complementarity over pure monetary gain and profit. Their Bartering for a Better Fiji (BBF) Facebook page now has more than 140,000 members exchanging and bartering on a regular basis, with the aim of helping one's neighbour as a key driving force.

## **3. Revival of the Agricultural Sector in Building Food Security for the Pacific Region**

In years past, and during the nation-building period in the Pacific, many development plans based their economic stability on a robust agricultural sector. In subsequent development plans, many of our countries shifted focus to economic efficiency, to the detriment of social stability, food security and resilience. COVID-19 has unraveled that seemingly 'robust economy' and revealed its fragility and false sense of security in an economic platform that is built, to a significant degree, on a sector that is designed to service an overseas market. As a consequence of COVID-19, our Pacific economies will need a pivotal and strategic rethink; this is a strategic pivot towards reaffirming those sustainable development pillars for growth.

COVID-19 provides our Pacific islands with the unique opportunity to put into action many of those policies that were adopted but not implemented due to a lack of resources and poor development choices of governments that are largely influenced by the preferences of international financing institutions and development partners. We are given the opportunity now to secure our future by securing our food

supplies, improving our health systems, and providing incentives for our people to have their own back yard gardens, plantations and other food sources. We need to invest our financial resources into building our resilience as a community, so that we can build a future that can withstand further health pandemics and increased extreme weather patterns. Such is our predicament and such is our future as islands.

#### **4. Platforms for Greater Engagement in the Rethinking Process of a Post-COVID Pacific Region**

When COVID-19 hit the Pacific islands, governments were in a reactionary mode and could not see beyond the COVID-19 preventive mechanisms reaching the islands. Murmurs around the region are now calling for a rethink and, as mentioned above, this space is still an empty space. Current government policies note the need for change, yet all indications are that regional governments are bent on getting back to ‘normal.’ Therefore, there is a need for clarity on the options for the future, coupled with research-based information on what the future scenarios could be. Current reflections around the region point towards an economic and social resilience-based policy with the stewardship of the environment at its core, one that promotes the principles of reciprocity, social equity and justice. Most importantly, these models revolve around the critical core element of culture, which must become the basis for any post-COVID-19 model for the region.

Regional academic institutions should begin to offer research and analysis that would give our Pacific island governments and leaders the tools and research-based responses to the call for change, as we create a New Normal. This process could be strengthened not only through research but also accompanied by virtual discussion series that would socialise the building blocks of what is to be the New Normal. These spaces are much needed for the Pacific island countries and would be much appreciated by Pacific Islander leaders.

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#### ***About the Author***

Mr. Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi is the owner of KAIVAO SOLUTIONS, a development entrepreneurship consultancy firm. He also provides advisories and consultancies on development and political matters in the Pacific with regional and international organisations, and with some Pacific island governments. He is passionate about development, self-determination and spirituality. He is married to Eleni and they have five beautiful children.

# Integrated Ecological Accounting

*Arnie Saiki*



COVID-19 has been described as a wake-up call, a plague wrought by neoliberalism, a China virus, a Trump virus, a warning from Nature. As much as it is a global pandemic, this is also a political and ideological crisis that is challenging the global economic system. This is neither the first nor the last time that viruses have gone global, but what makes this coronavirus unique is that it is not just restricted to poor countries, as was SARS, MERS, Ebola, or even diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, or measles. It did the unimaginable – it became a crisis for the wealthy advanced economies as well, affecting everyone indiscriminately. As an equalizer, COVID-19 has done what not even climate change could – it has flattened the global economy. It took an invisible killer stalking the drivers of financial markets to unveil the deep flaws of this global economic system. Multinational corporations and investors have siphoned capital away from peoples' health and vulnerable communities, and fetishised resource wealth as one would an ocean of shells.

In 2008, the financial collapse signalled that a new economic order would arise. And one did, but hegemonic forces refused to surrender to markets they could not control. The economic establishment obstructed, militarised and destabilised regions that could undermine the system of privatisation and wealth accumulation. Ignoring international demands for sound climate policy, national accounting revisions and development goals, an insidious army spreading disinformation and fear disrupted and confused the public, implementing regime change in countries where it could, or engaging in direct action in those where it could not. No one expected the coronavirus to be a more efficient army than the ones hatched by public relations officers in government

bureaus of information. Over the past decade, many understood that another disruption to an unsustainable economy was coming, and it is important to note that the pandemic is not the *cause* of the economic collapse as is often reported, but the *trigger*. As an old economic paradigm gives way to new systems and markets, where should the Pacific be? Are we reweaving our economic future, or are we waiting for yet another factor to reinscribe our story of fragility?

Let me begin by saying that our economies appear only as bleak as the advanced industrialised economies appear. Our region is a people's economy. As villages and islands, we understand reciprocity and exchange. We engage in protocols and respect the customary rights of our land, Ocean and people. While the global economy struggles to reassert itself, there are going to be tremendous ideological struggles that will play out between the dominant and rising economies. Whether we like it or not, we are a part of the world, and isolationism is not an option. If we wait for the global economy to determine what our future is, it will be like waiting for a tsunami. The future is now and this is the time to assert an economy that works for the Pacific, and is recognised in the world. If we do not do this, we will remain beholden to backwards thinking that prioritises privatisation and wealth accumulation over people and environments.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is pragmatic to close our borders. However, that cannot be our only response during this crisis. As we shut down, we need to prepare for reopening by accounting for what we have, and restoring what we have lost. We have an Ocean of Value, and as the stewards of this Ocean, it is our ocean of data that will define our future in the global economy. Pandemics are the great resettlers of civilisation, and communities everywhere are re-evaluating their existence in the world. Although some will try, there is no going back. The collective impact of COVID-19 has reawakened our senses. We understand why systems fail and how new systems are possible. We are in that kind of time. Resettling the global economy means that there will be foundational and fundamental shifts. Economies need to put the health of peoples and environments first. That is what the Pacific can show the world. We can put forward an economic system that values our people and environments in a way that is commensurate with the future of global trade, development, investment and infrastructure. By practicing and exercising our collective strengths, we will overcome the tyranny of industrialised states. We are resourceful and resilient, but that does not mean that, as the advanced economies struggle to reassert their own dominating worldview, we should aim low and settle for their collective unraveling. We are reweaving, and while the world is unraveling we have already rewoven our connectedness with our history, identity and geographical

strengths, and we understand what opportunities are before us.

However, what that means for our economy is that we have set in motion a discourse of advancing climate action; we need to account for the value of restoring our Ocean's health and integrity. We already know how to sustainably manage our island and ocean resources, connect with our Oceanic continent, and provide for the wellbeing of our people and communities. Now we just need to agree on how to value that. As our collective strength is in our villages, COVID-19 has shown that it took only a matter of weeks for us to take the necessary measures to address and accommodate the kind of action necessary to protect our region. It is with this same urgency that we reveal our good governance and leadership by accounting for and valuing our region's health and wellbeing.

Currently, we know all too well the tense rivalry between China and the United States, and what other countries swept into this divisiveness are asking of us. We are not the advanced economies, and we are not wards of the state; we need to see ourselves for who we are: a Pacific economy. Our vision and leadership has been dormant under the collective trauma imposed by colonialism, neoliberalism and globalisation, and while what lies ahead requires tremendous responsibility, it is time to break the cycle of colonisation and understand that we have had over a hundred years to heal. We have the vision and we should trust our deep knowledge of how to rebuild, reweave and restore.

Let us not settle on a post-COVID-19 economy. As a region, our action agenda should be to assert our ecological and economic priorities and to adopt a way forward for cooperation in the global economy. We are navigating the dangerous yet beautiful dimensions of how to value the global economy. We are the ocean. How that plays out in the Pacific, a region at the heart of the superpowers' strategic tensions and rival economic strategies, will be a sign of where the rest of the world should follow. Accounting for our ecological biodiversity is exactly the vision that we need to put into practice, and how we do this will set into motion a new global economy. A Pacific economy can show the world how to value the best of times by accounting for the worst of times.

***About the Author***

Arnie Saiki writes on political and economic issues in Asia-Pacific in his blog Imipono.org. He is currently part of a Working Group on Data, Statistics and Valuation, which is working on a regional accounting framework designed for the Pacific and the Caribbean. He was the Coordinator for Moana Nui, a series of conferences organised in cooperation with the International Forum on Globalization in Honolulu and Berkeley. He received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for his work on “Statehood and Hawai‘i: Correspondences between the State Department, Congress and the United Nations,” and his published articles have appeared in *American Quarterly*, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, *LA Progressive*, *Global Research*, *Pacific Islands News Association*, *PacTrade*, *The Hawaii Independent*, the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, and *Honolulu Civil Beat*.

# Back to the Future: Life after COVID-19

*Martyn Namorong*



As individuals, families, communities, nations and organisations ponder about things getting back to ‘normal’ post-COVID-19, one wonders what that ‘normal’ would look like.

The 19th century French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr famously wrote, “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” – “the more things change the more they stay the same.” Karr was reflecting on the rather cyclical nature of events and human behaviour, even though human perceptions of time and history are that they unfold in a linear fashion with a past, present and future.

In the early 20th century, the H1N1 flu pandemic broke out in Spain in 1918 and quickly spread across the world, killing between 15 and 17 million people. Fast forward a hundred years and we see Spain and various nations across the globe battling the SARS COV2 virus that causes COVID-19. Millions of people have been infected and, just as things unfolded during the 1918 pandemic, scientists and politicians like Donald Trump are championing supposedly miracle cures such as an anti-malarial drug, without much scientific evidence. (Believe it or not, people were trying to cure the 1918 flu with another anti-malarial drug – quinine.)

The 1918 pandemic had arrived on the back of the European and American Industrial Revolution which began in the mid-18th century. Also known as the First Industrial Revolution, this was a period from around 1760–1840 in which the Western hemisphere transformed its means of production through technological innovation. New machines and tools were developed, including

the transition from water wheels to coal and steam engines. The world moved from wind powered ships to steam powered ships and from horse-drawn carriages to coal fired trains. Many rural people moved to urban centres where they found jobs in factories. European nations extended their empires across the globe. It was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. When the H1N1 flu virus arrived, the social and economic order was ripe for the picking. Then, as is the case today, no one blamed the model of development. No one blamed the manner in which society had organised itself so as to be so vulnerable that 15–17 million people would pay the ultimate price. What happened then, as is happening now, was an unnatural event. Why was it unnatural then, and why is it unnatural today? Because viruses do not move, people move. Humans have become the disease-carrying mosquito, if you like.

Christians in Papua New Guinea should be very familiar with this theme. The Bible is full of stories in which, as societies accelerated their technological and economic progression, their Achilles heel was that the so-called progression in human development also exposed humanity to greater calamity. Biblical societies were the birthplace of the modern Western world, as European history can be traced back through the ancient Roman and Greek empires to the kingdoms of Egypt and Babylon. This is historical fact. Contemporary Western culture, music, science, philosophy and law have their roots in the Middle East. And so throughout history, the Tower of Babel continues to collapse every time wise guys try to rebuild it.

The issue at hand (beyond historical and religious considerations) is this: *What kinds of narratives or stories are we to believe about ourselves as Papua New Guineans? The stories we tell each other and translate into action produce the kinds of outcomes we see in society. Who are we? What is the purpose of our government and of having an economy? Why do we have children? What kind of world do we want to live in?* A story that rarely gets told to Papua New Guineans today is our own Melanesian story. It is a story that is as old as when the first human beings set foot on the island of New Guinea over 50,000 years ago. It is a story about one of the world's oldest surviving civilisations, whose existence on Melanesian soil continues to this day uninterrupted. We know for a fact that agriculture developed independently here in Papua New Guinea over 8,000 years ago. All of the world's sugarcane originates from our land. Our ancestors, whose blood runs through our veins, developed a sustainable social and economic order that still supports over 80 percent of our population to this very day.

As the world around us looks increasingly uncertain, how we get through this COVID-19 crisis will depend largely on the stories or narratives we believe. Do we live in a truly Westernised economy or a Melanesian hybrid? Are we truly a Christian country or a Melanesian hybrid? Are we a Melanesian country or a Western hybrid? These are important questions that we need to reflect on before we sign up to various narratives being propagated at the moment. Papua New Guinean roots do not lie in any external social and economic order but in the ancient Melanesian social and economic foundations of our traditional societies. The relevance of our ancient Melanesian roots was first tested during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, and more recently during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. What lessons did we learn from the 1997 and 2008 crises? What lessons did we learn from other health epidemics that have hit us? This is not to say that we are like Teflon, invincible to every harm, but asking such questions helps us understand the different undercurrents of Papua New Guinean social and economic organisation that buffer our people from these external shocks. What are our internal safety nets that protect us, and how do we bolster them during this time of crisis?

It is the robustness of our internal agriculture system that will help us withstand any food crisis and fight disease. It is the robustness of our internal social safety mechanisms that will help us survive the expected drop in economic activity and employment. In this time of crisis, let us rely on our strengths as Papua New Guineans, as opposed to listening too much to those highlighting our weaknesses. Let us show the world that there are alternatives to the Western-centric socio-economic and political arrangements. Let us show them the social and economic mechanisms that have enabled Melanesian societies to exist on this planet for millennia.

The Western models of development have time and time again shown how weak and vulnerable they are. Their weaknesses are being laid bare by the coronavirus pandemic. We have an alternative to offer the world. When the stock markets crashed in 2008, hardly anyone in Mt Bosavi or Tsoi Island noticed this. The same will happen with this crisis if we protect those isolated communities and do not transport the virus to them. It is amusing that policy makers and ordinary citizens love to talk about the 80 percent who are the nation's rural majority; however, in times of crisis the voices of the 'rural majority' and the innate strengths of their traditional lifestyles are barely reflected in public debate or policy. This must change as we create a post-pandemic New Normal.

*About the Author*

Martyn Namorong is a Papua New Guinean writer and political commentator. Martyn dropped out of Medical School in 2009 and sold betel nuts on the streets of Port Moresby for several years before becoming one of PNG's most influential bloggers and political antagonists. He has used his influence to bring to the nation's attention many of PNG's social, economic and political failings, including the exploitation of indigenous Papua New Guineans by foreign multinational corporations and the nation's predatory elite.



# “Organic Farming”

Photo Credit: Iliana Biutu

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# Oceania's Prosperity of Tomorrow Depends on Sustainability Today

*Vaelupemaua Junior Kirstin Uatisono II*



Sustainable development is a very significant phenomenon that we, in our own respectful communities, should practice. It ensures that our ability to utilise our natural resources is preserved and maintained to meet people's needs, without conceding the security and availability of natural resources for future generations.

There are diverse forms of sustainable development models and practices that our people have developed over centuries within our island communities. One approach is forest conservation (*faasao*). In 2019, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment began a campaign to advance forest management in Samoa. The aim is to rehabilitate the degraded land areas of Upolu and Savaii, and to protect the biological diversity of plants.

In addition to the forest conservation campaign, the Ministry developed a strategy of planting two million trees. It was a local community based project, and everyone managed to take part in setting aside time to plant trees in their villages. This was, in fact, a very good initiative for everyone to participate in, to be educated on how important the environment is, and to put a stop to deforestation. The initiative reached all levels of society, even in the civil service. The Bank of the South Pacific decided to contribute to the campaign by striving to plant 500 trees as their share in the initiative, with their theme "Save a life by planting a tree." This initiative evolved over a period of time and Samoa now has a specific day in which the nation celebrates trees by people volunteering to

engage in tree planting projects in different villages. It is a way for communities to come together and to contribute positively to the environment.

There are several other initiatives implemented for sustainable living in Samoa. One is an initiative to encourage the use of water tanks as water catchments, whereby the government and NGOs have kindly donated to families for water conservation and storage. Another initiative is the banning of single-use plastic bags, and the enforcement of the use of sustainable bio-degradable bags. These are highly relevant in the battle to reverse environmental damage and the resulting dilemmas that we are witnessing and experiencing today. These include global warming and other impacts of climate change, pollution, and health complications that are harmful and poisonous to our environment. Although these problems have been addressed before, there is still not enough consideration, resources and action put into public awareness programmes, especially with the local people in our communities.

Subsistence living is still the main economic characteristic of most Samoans. In fact, most of our people depend heavily on the environment and its natural resources for our daily sustenance – food and income. Almost all Samoan families have acres of land, mostly in the rural areas, which are designated for plantation use. However, over the course of time our people's dependency on the natural environment and its resources has somewhat declined, due mainly to the introduction of modern technology. It has influenced the way our people live and has become a main influential factor on the youth of Samoa. They spend most their time on social media. Instead, they could be farming and developing their own plantations; they could be utilising the farming knowledge and practices that have been passed down to us by our ancestors and which have sustained our soil and natural environment for centuries.

At the same time, the government is investing substantially in building 'better' towns, although such developments are negatively affecting the environment. 'Better towns' means more people migrating into urban areas, congesting these areas and consequently intensifying problems such as soil runoff, waste, rubbish and air pollution. Because of this approach, people are less caring about the negative impacts which such 'development' will have on the environment. The clearing of forests for infrastructure and other developments diminishes the value of the soil and destroys the environment. This contributes to the negative impacts on our wildlife and their natural habitats. It exposes them to hunters and predators, which could make them endangered and possibly lead to species extinction. Such human activities have resulted in land degradation, causing distress, impairment and loss of our natural surroundings.

The vast forfeiture of biodiversity in our world's ecosystem is triggered by human greed and lack of understanding with regards to sustainable resource use and development. The use of dynamite and poisonous harmful chemicals as fishing methods destroys marine life – fish species and corals. These are unsustainable fishing practices. The chemicals used not only spread throughout the ocean, but also make fish unhealthy for consumption. It is our insatiability for money and wealth, our ambition for a life of luxury and leisure, and our blindness to our limits as human beings that are causing the destruction of our planet's ecosystem.

The Pacific is very vulnerable and defenceless against strong waves and storm surges. Climate change impacts on our islands are felt more intensely every year: sea level rise is getting worse and worse each year, eroding our shorelines and increasing the salinity of our ground water. Climate change has also led to greater frequency and intensity in the occurrences of cyclones, droughts and increased density of rainfall. No matter how hard families try to rejuvenate, rebuild and start over, such natural disasters manage to wipe everything away. This is what is happening now. The next 20 years for Samoa are uncertain and could be chaotic, if we do not do something about these projections today. If not, then we will lose our homes, our lands, our culture and, most importantly, our identity as Samoan people. Our Pacific islands are battling climate change *now*, not in the future, and what we are going through is immeasurable. We are destroying our own planet, yet we have done so little to fix it. We all need to take a stance, take action now, or it will be too late. We can still reverse what we have done. The solutions are in our hands: if we want to live sustainably, then we must work together for the betterment of our Pacific islands.

### ***About the Author***

Vaelupemaua is of Samoan/Rotuman descent and is a proud Pacific Islander. He spent most of his academic life in Samoa (Upolu Island), until graduating and completing his Foundation Year at the National University of Samoa. He then earned a scholarship to pursue a Bachelor's degree at the University of the South Pacific (USP), Laucala campus, Fiji. He graduated with a double-major Bachelor's degree in Geography and Sociology. He is now currently employed at PUMA Samoa (Planning Urban Management Agency) as a Strategic Planning Officer. He is the pianist, composer and choir master for Vaivaise-Uta Methodist church choir and has also worked with other choirs in Fiji, such as the Thurston St Samoan church in Suva, the Labasa LDS District choir, and the renowned Pacific Theological College choir.

# Rethinking Ecology from a Multicoloured Lens

*Iemaima Va'ai*



Over the past few months the COVID-19 pandemic has created not only a huge shift in our global economies, but also forced governments to implement security measures such as lockdowns, which lessen the movements of people and limit the spread of the virus. The pandemic has exposed the hypocrisy of a capitalist system that only cares for profit-driven agendas and, as a result, has left thousands of people around the world unemployed and homeless. Numerous industrial businesses are on the verge of permanent closure, and poverty is becoming an increasing issue as lockdown continues.

However, in response to these security measures and the shift in global economies, the earth has miraculously benefitted from the pandemic crisis. Our planet has shown significant signs of alleviation through air pollution dropping at least 40% in some countries, while other countries experience critically endangered species coming out of hiding after decades of not being seen. These phenomena have led people to create new discussions on how our world and economies should be played out in regards to the post-pandemic future, bringing in a New Normal.

In the Pacific, however, the idea behind this phrase is not entirely new. It is more a chance for our people to return to their indigenous life-affirming ways, whereby we had valued the holistic wellbeing of persons more than profit. Today, material wealth and profits have become the constant measures for growth in conventional economics all over the world. Our Pacific cultures have always had embedded within them a sense of stewardship. Rather than being the centre of the world's ecology, the human person is only one among many life forms,

albeit with the duty of stewardship. This relational mentality was what kept our livelihoods sustained for centuries, and also birthed a culture of respect for our land in which, as Pacific indigenous people, we provide much needed space for our environment to breathe after being exploited for gain for so long.

Scientific facts state that the coronavirus pandemic will cause the largest annual fall in CO2 emissions to date. With more countries enforcing lockdowns and fossil fuel demands drastically decreasing, this opportunity can allow countries to shift their economies to an eco-friendlier approach. However, the efforts to create such a New Normal for global economies will not succeed unless people's mindsets change. Many of the world's economies focus on a one-dimensional/coloured worldview, in which people are superior to earth and the latter is often excluded in the development models of the powerful.

In order for these large economies to thrive in a sustainable New Normal, they must rearrange their mindset to a *multicoloured* one – a worldview based on a relational trust between humanity and mother earth. This is a multicoloured worldview that involves the inclusion of a wide variety of colours, such as the lush green shades of plants and trees, the beautiful blue *moana* (sea), and the different skin complexions of each human race. It is a worldview that treasures the beauty in the diversity of God's creation, where multiple relationships are shared and where each being, whether human or in nature, has been created equally. Our Pacific cultures were founded on this multicoloured and multi-dimensional worldview, in which we included earth as part of our family. We saw the land as kin and relative, and we rendered it much respect, as we would accord to the elders in our communities. This was how our lives maintained harmony and balance.

My vision for an ecological New Normal is to embrace a multicoloured worldview which entails multiple relationships, not only with human beings but also with our land, our oceans, our mother earth. The post-pandemic future brings forth an opportunity for our global economic systems to change, but also for our Pacific communities to return to the economy of sharing and respecting the relations they share with each other and the environment.

This is an urgent call for political, church and traditional leaders, along with their people, to rethink the importance of our Pacific indigenous knowledge when it comes to developing their small island nations sustainably and durably, in order to reweave into our economies a multicoloured development narrative that embraces the importance of the holistic wellbeing of all creation. 'Reweaving

the Ecological Mat' is a great initiative that inspires hope for people to unpack the toxic strands in our economies so as to help re-map the kind of sustainable economy we want to build for ourselves. It is an initiative which can be adopted and implemented in communities as a guide to steer us towards achieving the sustainable development we desire, not just for ourselves but for the global capitalist economies.

Although the impact of COVID-19 has caused much tragedy on the one hand, on the other hand we should not dwell on the negativity but, rather, use this opportunity to bring forth positive and long-lasting change for our region and the global human family, in which we respect and live in harmony with our environment.

### ***About the Author***

Ms Iemaima Va'ai is of Samoan descent and is currently enrolled in the climate change postgraduate program at the University of the South Pacific. Growing up in the Samoan culture, she was constantly taught by her parents about the *mana* the land holds and the importance of respecting it in order to maintain a harmonious balance. These teachings were what birthed her interest in environmental conservation, and her passion grew as she became more involved in volunteering and awareness programmes. Iemaima is the current president of the WWF Pacific Volunteering Programme and is committed to youth empowerment programs. She strongly believes that Pacific youth hold an influential role in leading their communities to a future that safeguards the livelihoods of our Pacific people. She is currently the ecumenical enabler for the Pacific Conference of Churches stewardship program, and believes this position is critical as it ensures regional member churches play their part in steering their people into advocacy work around climate action. She knows how powerful the voice of the church is in changing the Pacific narrative, which is why she is inspired to work as a young advocate for ecological stewardship in our Pacific church communities.

# The Pacific and My Fiji of Tomorrow

*Emele Duituturaga*



I am reminded of the Pacific Vision adopted by our Pacific Forum Leaders in 2004 at the dawn of the new century – a vision to guide regionalism and Pacific Islands Forum actions and policies:

*“Leaders believe the Pacific region can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives. We treasure the diversity of the Pacific and seek a future in which its cultures, traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed. We seek a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values, and for its defence and promotion of human rights. We seek partnerships with our neighbours and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all” (Pacific Islands Forum April 2004).*

I believe that this vision is still relevant; however, it was a top-down approach. It came from established leaders, probably drafted by officials, detached from the people. My vision is for a bottom-up approach to achieve the leaders’ vision. A bottom-up approach starts with the people in a local community in a specific country.

My vision is for Pacific peoples to be engaged in the governance of their communities, their nation and the region. It is that every child, woman and man is educated about and made aware that their lives matter, that they can and should live free and worthwhile lives through a schooling and community

education system that develops their fullest potential to contribute positively to their families, communities and nation.

It is that boys and men learn from their fathers and other significant male figures, and that their sisters and mothers are to be valued and loved and not abused and violated. It is that boys and girls respect each other equally, and parents and families bring up their sons and daughters to value their differences equally.

My vision is for nations to be healed, especially for Fiji. It is that leaders of all walks of life, young and old, are brought together for structured dialogue to negotiate a vision for their communities and for their nation. It is that this is facilitated by expert peace builders to allow for deep wounds to surface and healing to take place.

My vision is that a new development paradigm is articulated that replaces the prevailing dominant extractive development paradigm which benefits the rich, plunders and exploits natural resources without the prior informed consent of resource owners, damages the environment, and leads to cultural annihilation.

It is that governments are truly accountable to their people through a voting system that is fair and representative, and that guarantees both men and women are elected and voters are not bought, elections are not rigged, and people understand through effective civic education their responsibility and meaningful participation in democratic governance.

My vision is that national parliaments are not the only representatives of the people, but that traditional, faith and civil society leaders, including women and youth, can come together regularly to monitor and discuss the new paradigm, the people's vision, a new national charter and social contract for a negotiated Fiji.

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***About the Author***

Emele Duituturaga is a Fiji national currently working as an expert Pacific development consultant. She was the Director of the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) for 10 years – a regional coordinating body for national umbrella NGOs in 21 Pacific island nations and territories, providing strategic direction for the regional platform, management and technical support to member and partner CSOs, policy advocacy, and representing Pacific CSOs in regional and global arenas. Previously she worked as a senior civil servant for the government of Fiji, as an academic, and in various roles in the public and private sectors across the region. She has also lived and worked in New Zealand, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. She has more recently become involved in local community and nation-building and the political landscaping of Fiji.





**“Road to Learning”**  
Photo Credit: Rusila Nabouniu

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# My Ecological Vision of the Future

*Alisi Rabukawaqa*



Just as I am a woman, a marine scientist, a wife, a mother with a young family, an individual who still identifies as a youth at 32, my multifaceted being is reflected in the many things I view as necessary to address. This is not a comprehensive list but these would be a great place to start.

**Education!** A complete overhaul of our education style, structure and content is needed. Distance learning and technology are already showing us how creative and inclusive learning can be. I do not have the answers for the new way, but I know the old methodology no longer works, and we should already be open to new ideas and planning to change how we learn, and why we learn.

**Employment!** What are ‘essential services?’ Rethinking what we mean by this phrase will redefine or reprioritise what we learn: how to plant, how to fish and farm, hygiene, arts, how to care for our environment, how to care for others, how to ensure the rule of law, respect for each other, and in turn how we work.

**Cultural Practices!** These have evolved and will continue to do so. I hope we do not get too caught up trying to hold on to what we may need to let go of. In your *mataqali*, in your *yavusa*, *vanua*, these changes will happen, and you will need to determine for yourselves how you wish to move forward as cultural beings. There is no institution or organisation that has the authority to determine that for you. The same applies to all our diverse cultures in Fiji and the Pacific.

**Adventure, Travel, Discovery, Curiosity!** I hope we keep these things alive and find new ways to continue to live complete lives in the light of a global pandemic, in this New Normal where we are encouraged to stay home, practice social distancing, and live virtually.

**Environmental and Climate Justice!** I hope we do not choke, pollute and strain our natural environment with an over-reliance on commercially manufactured soaps and disinfectants as a result of the pandemic. Instead, we should use PPE (personal protective equipment) and all the materials we need to continue to exist comfortably in this new ecosystem largely influenced by a virus. We must continue to demand that governments keep fossil fuels in the ground and that they not bail out billion-dollar fossil fuel companies! Instead, choose people over corporations every day! We must fight for just transitions to renewable energy sources and continue to remind the bigger countries that we are and will continue to fight the anthropogenic climate change. COVID-19 only compounds the negative impacts that we are already facing in the Pacific, as more Category 5 cyclones have hit us and will continue to do so.

We may be among the least developed countries, yet our small islands in our large Ocean state of the Pacific deserve our existence, and we must continue to fight to preserve our island homes in all their diversity and beauty.

***About the Author***

Alisi Rabukawaqa-Nacewa is from the Bua province in Fiji. She graduated from the University of the South Pacific with a Bachelor's degree in Marine Science, and has for the last ten years worked passionately in the area of environmental conservation, as well as climate activism and indigenous people's traditional rights and knowledge advocacy.

# **I have rainbows in my veins – Chasing after a New Covenant: A Gender Diverse Perspective on the New Normal**

*Benjamin V. Patel*



And God said, “This is the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:12-13).

I have always loved this particular passage in the Bible because it talks about the promise or covenant that God made with all of creation. This was a promise that God would never flood the world again as punishment for their sins, and that He would protect creation for all future generations. It is comforting to know that God has a covenant with me. Every time I see a rainbow in the sky, I am reminded of this covenant.

If we really unpack the Word of God, it reiterates the fact that God’s covenant with us went through many phases throughout the Bible, ending with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matthew 27:51 states, “...and behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The Gospel tells us that, directly after the death of Jesus, the veil of the temple was torn in two. Matthew in particular narrates the tearing of the veil in a way that reveals its epoch-turning significance. In the new life revealed by the ‘tearing of the veil,’ we are to live Christ-like lives and remember that Jesus Christ came into the world for all sinners, to teach and show LOVE. In the end, he died so that his precious blood could wash all human transgressions away.

I want to begin by acknowledging that gender diversity is a difficult conversation, which many feel very uncomfortable having, and I enter this space with humility as a child of the Pacific. When I talk about my own gender perspective, it brings back a lot of the hurt and pain that I and others in the LGBTQI community have to face daily. As a Christian, I was raised to believe in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which teaches love, humility, kindness, acceptance and forgiveness. I also believe that the most powerful commandments of Christ are to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ and to refrain from judging others.

Sadly, today there is so much racism, stigma and discrimination in the world, wherever we see diversity. This includes diversities surrounding race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, self-expression and sexual orientation. Religions and the churches in the current context have become institutionalised, as well as politicised, in the way they disseminate information in relation to holy texts or doctrines. Too often we see church leaders choosing to focus on Old Testament scriptures based on their own personal agendas, biases or propaganda, which instils hate and allows for discrimination and violence for all those considered minorities. I believe that as Christians in our churches, educational institutions and family units, we are meant to follow the teachings and example of Christ. I am reminded of Pope Francis who said, *“St. Peter committed one of the greatest sins, denying Christ, yet they made him Pope. Think about that.”* When Pope Francis was questioned about homosexuality, he responded by saying, *“If they accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them?”*

Envisioning what the post-pandemic New Normal will look like in the Pacific is enticing for those of us who are minorities in our various communities, because it gives us hope regarding what the world could be. Personally, it provides a moment of self-reflection considering the struggles facing members of my LGBTQI community. This is a struggle I have experienced from a young age. Over time I have come to realise that the stigma, discrimination and ill treatment are due to a lack of information in the home, schools and the church. My main concern is in both the school and at home. For me, a New Normal would mean unpacking these two institutions to create safe, loving and nurturing spaces for all Pacific people, especially children. To do this, we will need curriculum reform and some form of communal and family intervention.

### **Inclusive Education**

Here in the Pacific, the current reproductive health and rights curriculum and Life Studies at primary and secondary school levels are outdated. In many instances, the focus remains on generic biology –how the anatomy of the human

body works and its development during puberty, assuming a heteronormative narrative in terms of relationships that is based on a binary understanding of gender. In my New Normal, this will change into a more inclusive curriculum which teaches students not just anatomy and physical development but also body autonomy and relationship studies, through which students are made aware that although there is a dominant heteronormative narrative, there are also other types of relationships, and it is okay to be different and diverse. The curriculum should also cover the various forms of violence experienced by people of diverse gender orientations, encouraging discussions about how to respect people and who we can trust when facing violence. The curriculum envisioned will need to be age-appropriate, and those involved in the education sector will need to hold consultations with relevant stakeholders and parents. Teacher training will be important so that they are able to answer questions, handle conflicting situations, and create practical case studies.

The new curriculum needs to be more informative and non-offensive by having relevant stakeholders and the education ministry create a Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) inclusive content document. This will be beneficial to students, especially those in minority groups, in terms of understanding the changes in their bodies and the diverse relationships that exist in our communities, while creating a safe space for them to be themselves and be accepted. It will also allow students to learn about the different forms of abuse and violence faced in our communities.

The future we want is one in which youths develop more acceptance and open-mindedness concerning the minorities in the already diverse community in which they live. It will create a more inclusive and safe space which, as a result, may contribute to a decrease in gender-based violence and hate crimes, as well as improving the quality of life. This may even lead to opportunities for further education, health and economic empowerment. The American educational philosopher John Dewey said of progressive education: *“Education is not preparation for Life. Education is Life itself.”* He went on to say that the school is a microcosm of society, and what we want to see in society we should put into the school. If what we want is a future with social cohesion and a decline in family and community violence, we will need to look at the role that education can play in helping us to achieve that new reality.

### **Safe, Loving Families**

In the Pacific, strong family values are important. Many of us are raised to believe that silence in our traditional and family contexts is a sign of respect

and humility. Because of this silencing, some issues are considered taboo to discuss within the family. This includes reproductive health and rights, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, as well as substance abuse and teenage pregnancy, to name a few. There is also a lack of understanding within families of the relevance of having these discussions as part of life lessons, initiating dialogue between parents and children in relation to their development, from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. The functionality of the family is dependent on the holistic relationship between parents and their children. It also depends on whether the family space is inclusive and safe for *talanoa* and participatory engagement for all. The future I envision emphasises this very concept, removing the taboos and allowing more open discussions between parent and child. This may be considered a Western concept, but if we look back in history we see that a lot of information was passed down from elder to child or youth through discussions via oral traditions and *talanoa* sessions.

Today many parents rely on social media, the internet and the schools, as well as other forms of media (whether it be television, music, radio, movies or multimedia) and daily interactions with peers to provide life education for their children. Children are also afraid to ask questions because they are not allowed to do so in their own homes, and they are concerned that their behaviour may be considered disrespectful. They are thus scared to ask questions in their classes at school, because they may be seen as being disrespectful to the teacher, and they may be bullied by their peers. The future I envision is one where the home is a safe space, allowing more in-depth discussions and dialogue in which no topic is considered taboo. I would like to see parents create a space for participatory discussions and critical thinking within the family. This will be important in developing an understanding of current issues, while inspiring positive change in the mentality and behaviour of children, adolescents and adults. This will in turn bring about behavioural changes and maturity within the family, the school, the workplace and the community.

## Hope

I envision the New Normal from an educational and family perspective, because it is within these two institutions that we receive much of our information and formation. Nelson Mandela once said, “*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,*” and it is with this power that we can create, influence and inspire either positive or negative change in our communities, the region and the world. The choice is ours.

***“The future we want is one in which youths develop more acceptance and open-mindedness toward the minorities in the already diverse community in which they live. ”***

***About the Author***

Being a member of the LGBTQI community and a person living with a disability in the Pacific, Benjamin Patel has developed interests in advocacy work around issues such as human rights, good governance, climate change, reproductive health and rights, and most recently the REM project. Benjamin has also been involved in the arts and culture sector, using these platforms as an advocacy tool as well as a form of expression. Currently a consultant at the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies, this work involves events management, funding opportunities and research, as well as advocacy work using the arts and our Pacific cultures as pillars to inspire positive change and critical thinking.

# As a Young Samoan Woman, Grant Me Justice

*Temukisa Kanasha Tuliaupupu*



A goal of the New Normal into which we are moving should be to liberate our context in a way that the marginalised are identified and the voiceless are heard. Samoa is an independent country but has a strong patriarchal society. It denies women the right to be ordained as ministers to serve the villages, the churches and the people. The culture is one main reason behind this denial. This is one burning issue my church is facing – gender inequality.

My church, the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), is the largest Christian denomination in our country. But it is difficult to address the issue of gender inequality because it has a very strong conservative foundation, both in theology and culture, that no one can fight. Women's ordination is not allowed in the church, and even the *matai* (chiefly) titles cannot be bestowed on women in my village. This is because of the belief that women belong in the home. I grew up in a church where women are excluded from ordained (recognised) ministry. Culturally, women have been placed in the lower tier in Samoan society. This culture is so strong that women have internalised it and believe it to be their reality. The CCCS has not been able to change with the times. The Samoan churches' ministries have always been male-dominated, even to this day. And women are still struggling to receive acknowledgement and recognition from the church for the enormous work they do for and on behalf of the church.

Pervasive gender inequality remains a barrier to progress, justice and social stability. It also hinders the achievement of the development goals our country sets for itself. It is time to work towards a brighter future for the church. This

must involve the young people of the church, as they will be the future leaders of the church. Therefore, in the story of the New Normal, we must advocate for women's participation and involvement in the churches' ministries, including the ordained ministry. We should have women's ordination advocacy workshops to privilege and honour the context of a *tama'ita'i* (woman) in Samoa. My vision is to see change within the next five years – where women are allowed to be ordained so that justice can be done and gender equality is realised.

***About the Author***

Ms Temukisa Kanesha Tuliaupupu is a 20-year-old woman from Samoa. She was born in the United States and raised in Samoa. She was the youth representative for Training in Mission 2019 from the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa. She is currently studying for her Bachelor of Commerce degree at the National University of Samoa. She is a young woman full of compassion and love for her people, her culture and her country. She is a proud Samoan *tama'ita'i* who is never ashamed of her identity, and an islander who lives life simply and joyfully.

# Re-assesing Pacific Health and Human Rights

*Daphney Kiki*



The COVID-19 pandemic in all its negativity also creates a situation which gives us a chance to rethink and redefine what we perceive as normal. The Pacific is always racing to catch up with the world in terms of the dominant norms of economic development and globalisation. Therefore, this crisis is an opportunity for the Pacific to take a step back and reassess its ‘normal’ by redefining what ‘human rights’ really means to us as Pacific people, especially in the arena of health. I believe that reassessing, redefining and contextualising human rights in our region will help us to work more closely with the marginalised and the most vulnerable people in our Pacific societies so that they can have a space to explore these fundamental issues, to contain their worries, to develop their capacities to act to create change – and to live up to the name *Pacific* (peaceful) Islands.

**Health:** The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number three is “Good Health and Wellbeing” (United Nations 2020). The vision behind this goal was to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all. The UN recognised the challenge of shifting away from GDP as the sole measure of economic development, which influences national policy making, by placing equal importance on ‘wellbeing’ and making it the central goal for sustainable development. This is to ensure that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption will not hinder sustainable development. It recognises “the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and wellbeing of all people” (United Nations 2020).

For Pacific island nations, there is no denying that inequalities in health services, living conditions and wealth exist, resulting in high mortality and morbidity rates and susceptibility to preventable and treatable diseases. A recent UN report on the SDG progress in the Pacific noted that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are at crisis levels. Obesity and diabetes rates are among the highest in the world, and are much higher than the estimated global prevalence of 10 percent. Up to 84 percent of deaths in Fiji and Samoa are from NCDs, ranking them among some of the highest in the world. Heart attacks and strokes are becoming common even among young people in the Pacific, and this is due to the lifestyle choices they make. The youngest stroke victim in PNG is reported to be just 23 years of age, and the youngest in Fiji is just 12 years of age (Togiba 2018). This poses the important question, “how did we let our island nations come to this unhealthy stage?”

Therefore, after the COVID-19 pandemic, I envision a Pacific health system that is not only viable but also resilient, one that can work according to the Pacific people’s needs in medical services and care. It will be one that understands and is aware of communities’ health needs and provides the best health education and services to the people. This will be a health system that is accessible and affordable to all, and which provides the highest standards of health services to the masses. In this New Normal, our Pacific region will become a medically resilient region and people, a region that has ‘healthy living’ cultures which promote healthy eating and healing. Such cultures will ensure that our region becomes more medically resilient in the face of future disease outbreaks and serious medical conditions or issues. It will be a health system that promotes Pacific foods, healthy eating cultures and values, and that celebrates indigenous health practices, organic food production, traditional healing and medicines, and indigenous cuisines and diets, all of which encourage wellbeing.

**Human Rights:** With the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, new rules and laws (emergency, health safety and security) were put in place by governments all over the world. We have witnessed over the past months how we needed to forego some of our human rights for the greater good. This means that our freedoms of movement and gathering were curtailed for a while and now are being limited. Many have become unemployed due to the closure of businesses, and schools have been suspended, limiting the right to basic education. There is an increase in racial discrimination and stigmatisation of people, an escalation of domestic violence during the lockdown period, an increasingly aggressive cyber-policing, and an increase in online surveillance during COVID-19 lockdowns.

A few political leaders have utilised these circumstances as an opportunity to make headway in consolidating their circumscribed powers, overlooking the fundamental principles of human rights, while social distancing makes public scrutiny less possible. Even the forceful isolation of people infected with COVID-19 challenges the rights and freedoms of patients to choose whether to be isolated at home or at a medical centre. Many have also lost the right of family members to be a part of the final rites of their loved ones who have died. All emergency laws put in place by COVID-19 will become a precedent for future emergency laws in similar situations. Therefore, the way our governments handle this current situation will determine our New Normal moving forward.

All Pacific constitutions contain a Declaration of Rights, and all Pacific island countries are signatories to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This means they are obligated under international law to uphold the human rights of their people. In 2015, the UN Millennium Development Goals came to an end but were transformed into Sustainable Development Goals. These UNSDGs were adopted by all UN member states, with the pledge *'leave no one behind'* as a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030” (United Nations 2020). However, in Pacific island nations some people have been left behind! The human rights of these people have been undermined, slow to take effect, or limited due to factors surrounding the enforcement and viability of these laws.

My vision for the Pacific post-COVID-19 is to make human rights the New Normal by rethinking the right to basic services such as basic education, water, housing and sanitation, health and justice. We must reaffirm the rights to freedom of movement, gathering and speech, the right to liberty and freedom from discrimination. We must take ownership of our rights to our indigenous land, knowledge and practices. We must be free from inequalities, violence and brutality, and live up to the name *Pacific* (peaceful) Islands.

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***About the Author***

Ms Daphney Kiki is a graduate of the University of the South Pacific. A young woman from Bukawa, Morobe Province, in Papua New Guinea, she is currently pursuing further law studies at the University of Fiji. She is passionate about learning and growing in capacity-building to help serve society more meaningfully, in the hope of making a positive difference in people's lives.

# Our New Story must Prioritise Health and Wellbeing

*Fuata Varea Singh*



One of the upsides of this COVID-19 pandemic is that many people have adopted a healthier lifestyle, through the consumption of more home-grown vegetables and the increase in physical activity, both of which contribute to their physical health and general wellbeing. Due to job losses, pay cuts, reduced hours of work, the lockdown, and the short supply of processed food, many families have opted to do more home gardening. The benefits of this include:

- families spending time together;
- teaching of life skills to the younger ones on how to weed, clean the yard and plant;
- increased level of physical activity;
- looking after God's creation by having more organic plants;
- reusing and recycling plastic bottles, egg trays and other materials regarded as waste;
- reduced expenses of buying vegetables; and,
- increase in the intake of fresh vegetables.

As hospital services were reduced to mainly emergencies during lockdowns, people were forced to rely on herbal medicine and traditional massage to cure them of their illnesses, where previously they would have gone to the hospital or to a doctor. Herbal medicines were very popular during the time of our forefathers and mothers. Eating fresh home-grown food, together with using herbal medicines, takes us back to an era where people were generally healthier than we are today. It also allows us to make use of important medicinal plants and to teach our next generation about the significance of looking after our environment and appreciating all the different types of plants we have. The closure of nightclubs and cinemas, the curfews, and limitations on social

gatherings has also allowed families to have more time together in the evenings, and go to bed earlier for a good night's rest.

It is also pleasing to see that some members from the fashion industry, like *8 Mountains*, have created and sold reusable menstruation pads. Not only are these cheaper for women in the long run, they are also environmentally friendly. The non-recyclable pads end up in the sea, rivers, or are dumped elsewhere, and are not environmentally friendly. Our grandmothers used reusable pads in the past, but things changed because buying pads from the store became more convenient and was seen as a sign of having money. I applaud *8 Mountains* for designing this for women and girls to use.

Going forward into a post-pandemic New Normal, the education curriculum of our schools should include more of the following: ● Backyard or subsistence farming, together with commercial farming; ● Learning about the different herbal medicines, and how to use these to cure sickness; ● *Learning about healthy lifestyles, healthy living and wellbeing*; ● And most of all, learning to look after God's creation and to use resources wisely.

There is a direct correlation between the Creator and his creation, and human health and wellbeing.

This pandemic has given us time to reflect on our lives, how things were done in the past, and how greed has destroyed all those gifts. Now, in the New Normal, we have an opportunity to do things right.

#### ***About the Author***

Mrs. Fuata Varea Singh is from the beautiful village of Malhaá in Rotuma. Her husband is Nirdesh Singh and they have five children. She currently works with the Council for World Mission as a Program Associate. Her hobbies include gardening, swimming, travelling and reading.

# Rise Up, Guardians of the Pacific

*Pat Visanti SSC*



As news of the coronavirus broke into the world at the end of 2019, none of us could imagine the scale of the deadly virus and the crippling effects it would have, even on the world's most advanced economies, causing the world to come to a standstill. For the past several months, most of the world's economies went into lockdown mode in an effort to try and contain the spread of COVID-19, and the death toll at the time of writing nears 500,000. Streets became empty, economies have been stretched to their limits, millions have lost their jobs, and many more lives are projected to be lost.

But as families and communities mourn the loss of their loved ones, the economic impact on peoples' lives and the stress of being confined to one's home for weeks, not being able to follow our normal routine, has been widely felt. Our planet's ecosystem, on the other hand, has breathed a sigh of great relief from a decrease in the pollution created by us in the name of development. The closures of industrial factories, the halt in logging and mining, and the reduction of noise and carbon emissions from our private vehicles have made an enormous positive impact on our environment.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed how waterways have become cleaner, air quality has improved in many cities, and animals and sea creatures are enjoying their natural habitat as a result of this shutdown. Our planet is surely being given a well overdue breathing space from the destructive hands of humanity. But the question really is: for how long will this last? Already many are eagerly awaiting the reopening of the economy and returning to the 'normal' that was.

It is obvious that we have habituated pollution, deforestation and the littering of our planet, and thus many do not see a problem with returning to the ‘normal’ that was. Our economies are heavily dependent on such unhealthy practices to keep us materially satisfied. We have become a ‘deadly virus’ to our planet’s ecological system and to ourselves, as a result of our greed and quest to conquer the world. After witnessing the great transformation of the environment here in Pakistan, where I am currently based, as a result of the lockdown, I do not wish to return to the ‘normal’ that was. I only wish that we would collectively embrace this New Normal and appreciate Mother Earth better for all she had been providing us.

In the Pacific, we are very fortunate to still have lush green vegetation, clear blue skies, white sandy beaches and crystal clear waters. It is my vision and I pray and hope that we, the guardians of the Pacific, will be passionate about maintaining her exquisite beauty. Protect our forests, our marine resources, and avoid exploitation at all cost. Utilise our natural resources wisely for our benefit and those of the future. Stop depending too much on supermarkets and manufactured products, and have passion for the food we grow with our own hands. In that way we are assured of chemical-free and daily fresh food supplies, and also a reduction in our spending budgets.

Rise up now, guardians of the Pacific, so that we do not regret the consequences of our inaction in the Old Normal. We in the Pacific are not the greatest contributors to the destruction of our ecological system, but we still have an important role in ensuring that our children and their children will not be deprived of a healthy and prosperous future. Educate them about the value of the land and the sea, and guide them to understand the knowledge of sustainable living and to practice it. Trade iPhones and iPads for seeds, fishing gear and backyard gardens, and make our children proud custodians of our Pacific Islands and Ocean.

We may not have the ‘big bucks’ like rich nations to splash around, but we can educate them to live in harmony with nature. This pandemic surely reminds us that we are truly guests in a world not of our own making, and guardians of a beautiful planet entrusted to us by our Creator.

Rise up, guardians of the Pacific, and may our actions be *the way the world should be*.

*About the Author*

Rev. Fr. Pat Roland Michael Visanti is a Columban Missionary Priest who is currently serving in the Sindha province in Pakistan with the tribal people. He is from the island of Rotuma in Fiji Islands. He was ordained to the priesthood on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2017, and is a 2017 graduate of the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva. Care for creation is a big part of his Columban work in Pakistan and in mission areas in other parts of the world. He and his fellow priests are engaged in tree planting and other environmental care projects, such as water management, waste recycling and education for sustainable living.

# GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

## Learning from the Butterfly?

*Kabini Sanga*



From a leadership perspective, the post-Covid-19 Pacific world can be changed for the better if Pacific Islander students, youth, mentors and leaders are receptive to and serious about learning from the butterfly! What can the butterfly teach a new generation of Pacific leaders about leadership?

Using the *tok piksa* (Solomon Islands *pijin* for metaphor) of the butterfly, let me explain in everyday language, as follows: By design, the butterfly begins its life as an egg which is deposited on a leaf. The egg then becomes a caterpillar, spending much of its time crawling around, eating the leaf that it crawls on. In time, the caterpillar moves away from the leaf it is eating to the underside of the leaf. It hangs there, shedding its skin several times. Through a process of wriggling, the caterpillar frees itself, changing into a cocoon, using a self-produced soft silk which hardens in time. Within this protective case or cocoon,

the caterpillar undergoes yet another transformation process of disassembling and reassembling. In this way, some cells are destroyed and new ones are formed or aligned into different body parts. In time, out of the cocoon comes a butterfly, fully transformed into a new shape, one which is more complex than its previous forms and is indeed a beautiful flying creature.

The point? Make this (post-Covid 19) season a starting line for transforming Pacific leadership by starting with our leadership mindsets. Let us stop the wandering/crawling around. Let us cease the hand-to-mouth existence. Let us stop devouring our food sources. Let us work to free ourselves, our families, clans, institutions and peoples. Let us move our leadership on from the hanging cocoon phase. Let us free our leadership from the suffocating confines of the hardened shell cocoon. Let us grow into maturity as leaders. Let us be the beautiful authentic leaders we can be, resembling a living, mature and flying butterfly. Let us free our leadership so that we might flourish in our changing and challenging Pacific world.

Just as the good Lord has designed the caterpillar to become a butterfly, we too as peoples of the Pacific who are created by our Sovereign Lord are meant to be beautiful, free and abundantly flourishing. Are we, the new generation of Pacific Islander mentors and leaders, receptive to learning from the butterfly?

***About the Author***

Professor Kabini Sanga, PhD, MNZM., was born and raised on the small atoll of Ngongosila in East Mala'ita, Solomon Islands. He hails from a long line of indigenous *fata-abu* (priests) in theocratic Mala'ita. He lives with wife Jennifer in Wellington, New Zealand, where he is a lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington. He is a mentor and educator.



## **“Follow the Leader”**

This painting was inspired by the tok piksa of the Solomon Islands. The birth and transformation of the butterfly. Its ability to break free from its mould and blossom into a beautiful flying creature... beckoning us to learn and follow in its example.

**Painting by Benjamin Dickson**

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# New and Old: Leadership Needs Vision, Courage and Commitment

*Jione Havea*



*Jione poses with a mentor, Denis Koibur, at Biak Papua*

The New Normal that COVID-19 has initiated is driven by fear. Economic downturns, lockdown and social distancing drive and sustain our fears.

Our fears are legitimate given the hops and leaps of the coronavirus on the global stage, infecting millions and mutating quicker than researchers could keep track. The virus shows no respect for borders and protections, and not even for the surveillances of artificial intelligence.

Our fears are reasonable given the state of health services in our islands (some do not have the capacity to test, much less to treat) and Pasifiki propensities to touch with hands and cheeks when we meet. Social distancing is not a native phenomenon.

At this juncture, the drive of the New Normal is to look forward with visions. I do not have the gift of visions, but I want to call the attention of our leaders (political and church) to some of the current struggles which will hopefully keep our visionaries on the ground.

- *First*, the economic models that governments are protecting have been failing for many years. COVID-19 has become the scapegoat, and it is painful that before the pandemic our governments did not have any resources to help the poor, but with the threats to businesses and

investors our governments now pump out rescue packages. Why are the poor not worthy of rescue? This is a question for our governments as well as for our churches, both of which stand on the shoulders of the poor. How might the New Normal of COVID-19 be an opportunity for imagining alternative economies? Who has the gifts to envision and institute such alternatives?

- *Second*, in the early days of the COVID-19 lockdown, Cyclone Harold (Categories 4 & 5) ambushed the lands, the waters and the peoples of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga, and the economic cost of that disaster will be much, much more than the cost for COVID-19. And Harold was only one cyclone, over seven days (April 2–9). Whatever shape our economies take in the future, may the lives of our lands and waters be taken into *account*. The fear that drives the New Normal of COVID-19 focuses on human lives, but the lives of vanua and moana also matter.
- *Third*, the curves (infection and death) recorded in Europe and the Americas are scary. Toward the end of April 2020, the US recorded 30,000+ infections and 3,000+ deaths on the same day, for several days. That is scary in the context of small island nations whose total populations at home and in diaspora are less than 30,000. Without downplaying the pain and the loss to the victims of COVID-19 and their families and communities, let us also bear in mind that, according to the WHO, around 300 children die every hour due to malnutrition (or 7,200 children a day). Let not the new pandemic (fearsome as it truly is) take our hearts and hands away from other current crises – poverty, poor health care, climate change, lack of access to resources, lack of clean water to even drink, much less to wash hands, etcetera.
- *Fourth*, the fact that the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) spreads by *contact* is, in my humble opinion, an opportunity to look at the impact of contact with the West on our waters. I am referring to colonisation, which was not free of the influence of Christianity. In addition to Western colonialists claiming (with force, deception and consecration) Pasifiki (is)lands for their crowns, Westerners also unleashed infectious diseases (e.g., smallpox, influenza, diphtheria, measles, chicken pox) in our region. I was therefore not surprised to see that the majority of islands with positive cases between the waters of West Papua, Aotearoa, Rapa Nui, Hawai'i and the Northern Marianas are under occupation

(except for Fiji, PNG and New Zealand). May the visions for the future of Pasifiki also take into account the colonisation of our waters, our lands, our hearts, our minds, and most things in between.

- *Fifth*, may we all support our young(er) native prophets to navigate us into a future where we are not caught by the traps of the present time. In light of the legacy of colonisation, one trap is critical: the trap of the ‘postcolonial rhetoric’ makes us think that we are past the crises of coloniality. Truth be told, our colonisation is ongoing, in different forms. May we not fall into the trap of talking about ‘after COVID-19’ or ‘post-COVID-19’ because this pandemic is staying. Viruses do not give up and go away. They mutate in new sheepskins and new wineskins. There will be vaccines and cures but, as with HIV, we must learn to live with COVID-19 on our shores.
- *Sixth and finally*, may the visions and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic be shaped by commitments and courage rather than fear.

***About the Author***

Jione Havea is a native pastor (Methodist Church in Tonga) and primary carer for a 6-year-old who behaves as if she is 60 and claims that her parents are 100. They currently live with the support of a patient partner/mother in the land of the Wurundjeri nation (what Pakehas call Melbourne).

# Corruption Free Leadership in PNG

*Joshua Osborne Iagata*



How can we empower and equip today's generation for a better tomorrow?

When someone or something is corrupt, it usually indicates the brokenness of the moral life of the person. If corrupt people, especially leaders such as politicians and church leaders, perform immoral or illegal acts for personal gain, or bribe others for their votes during political campaigns or church leadership elections, or accept bribes for favours and feel no remorse for their actions, this indicates not only personal but moral decay in society. One of the many reasons behind corruption in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Melanesia is the *Bigman culture*, which is based on money politics, and the *Wantok system*. A corrupt leader may often show narcissistic behaviour that includes a lack of ethics and moral philosophy, dishonesty, inconsistency with decision making, manipulation, incompetence, and a lack of accountability and remorsefulness.

Corruption is one of the biggest development issues in my country, and it affects all levels of society. It threatens sustainable economic development, our society's ethical values and justice, and it destabilises our society and endangers the rule of law. It threatens the institutions and values of our democracy. Grassroots people suffer most the harmful effects of corruption, because public policies and public resources that are ostensibly for their benefit are abused by corrupt leaders.

The Independent State of Papua New Guinea is culturally and linguistically very diverse. It is also very rich in natural resources such as gold, copper, oil and timber. But even with these riches, the country's economy cannot cater

for the 8 million-plus citizens at this time of state emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason is corruption and the moral breakdown in our society. Looking at the country as a whole, there is a lack of infrastructure development, especially in terms of basic services such as health care facilities. This clearly speaks of how CORRUPT our leaders are with respect to the lack of basic social and health services.

As a leader of my community, and also a representative of youths in the country, observing the corrupt practices of leaders in politics, and even in the churches and civil society organisations, breaks my heart because leaders are supposed to be 'GOOD ROLE MODELS for the people they serve or those who work under their leadership.

My vision is that we educate the next generation on the importance of moral leadership in attending to the welfare of our people, and put an end to the generational curse of corruption in our nation, so that we can ensure a better Papua New Guinea for all.

***About the Author***

Mr. Joshua Osborne Iagata is 23 years of age. He was born and raised in Saroa Village, Kwikila town, Rigo District in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea. He currently works with the United Church of Papua New Guinea as its Youth and Children Ambassador to overseas missions. He is passionate about the welfare of others and preserving his Papua New Guinea culture, traditions and customs. He loves children but, more generally, those who are homeless, uneducated and not so fortunate. He loves to live life the Pacific Way.

# Transformational Leadership is Essential for the Future

*Laitia Tamata*



This contribution is in response to the ‘call for visions’ for life in the post-pandemic Pacific, and draws on transformational leadership development theory.<sup>49</sup> I would like to share some thoughts on this under the following subtopics.

## **How are Visions Created?**

Next Generation Leadership<sup>50</sup> creates and generates a new future, a future that is different from a predictable ‘business as usual’ future. It is the duty of leadership to create and generate visions and to enlist people in the realisation of these visions. The purpose of this contribution is to explore ways in which ‘liberating’ visions could be created and generated in our Pacific context.

## **A New Worldview**

While we have one world and one universe, our views of the same one universe and one world are different. These differences are determined by our different backgrounds, where we come from, where we are and where are we heading, our thought processes and our awareness of ourselves and those around us.

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<sup>49</sup> Transformational leadership is the winner of the prize for the most researched, studied and debated approach to leadership. It also has more influence than any other leadership approach on the organisational leaders of today.

<sup>50</sup> This is from the Transformational Leadership Development Program, whereby Next Generation Leadership is developed from the statement that ‘the resourcefulness of leadership into the next generation is in their ability to interpret the future for the future.’

These shape and influence how we see the world, and condition us to adopt what we consider appropriate and acceptable. The dominant worldview today does not take well to other or opposing worldviews – just as communism and democracy slugged it out for centuries.<sup>51</sup>

Next Generation Leadership recognises that differences in worldviews also entail differences in thinking processes. Whether the thought processes that we have adopted are of benefit to us or not is largely determined by the dominant persons or systems that have influenced our thought processes through events that have happened in the past, such as colonialism, social traditions and cultural practices. These are most often immortalised with the use of phrases like ‘from time immemorial.’ Furthermore, the dominant thought processes may be similar across cultures and societies, but our individual and group interpretations of these processes differ because of changing conditions and circumstances. The vision remains but the interpretations of the vision by various players differ at different times.<sup>52</sup>

Some of these visions, which may be termed ‘capitalist’ or the ‘one world order,’ could be the continuation of the same vision yet accorded different interpretations and terminologies. Dominant worldviews therefore are envisioned, created and generated by influential people who make use of official systems to support their worldview, but with themselves as the sole beneficiaries, in the name of the global good. Knowing that a variety of thinking processes are used to facilitate visions, and that these visions and thinking processes are created by leaders, is a clear benefit of Next Generation Leadership, as boldly stated in the Republic of Marshall Islands Strategic Vision: *The World in Our Hands!*

### **“All there are, are Interpretations”**

Next Generation Leaders realise that *there is no absolute truth – truth is a relative process*. They understand that there are ‘different worldviews of the same world,’ and that while the Elite may convince themselves that there is one

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51 In Fiji, there are records of the late Ratu Sukuna, who was initially befriended by the indentured labourers from India, and was sent to Oxford University to be groomed as an indigenous Fijian leader. He returned and was labelled a ‘huge black Englishman.’ He was attributed with the saying that ‘the only good Indian is a dead Indian,’ although the saying was originally used by the early English settlers in the United States in reference to the First Nations People. Others, like Apolosi Ranawai and Navosa, who came up with ideas that contradicted the introduced capitalism system, were exiled as threats to the British Empire vision.

52 My recent learnings have been that the one Bible and the One God are given different emphases in different times and places, together with different emphases at each moment of civilisation.

universal truth, in reality there are many interpretations of reality and many ways of viewing the world.

### **Liberating Visions and Creative Hope for our Region**

A key component of Next Generation Leadership is the ability to create breakthroughs. When leaders merely manage or administer a vision in which they are invested, this does not create and generate new breakthroughs and, worse still, can lead to societal breakdown. It is the duty of Next Generation Leaders to be resourceful when interpreting social realities so as to create a better future.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Process of Critical Thinking in Creating and Generating Breakthroughs**

Liberating visions and creative hope are not a destination but a process. Next Generation Leadership is concerned with the future – a future that requires effort, intention, patience, imagination, humility and intentional human activity. Next Generation Leadership is about learning the skills of making a future possible and then making what is possible real.

### **Next Generation Leaders acknowledge that there are indigenous thought processes that could create and generate hope for our Pacific region and are not stuck in thinking processes that are not liberating for our people.**

Instead, they create and generate a new future by planning that draws on indigenous resources and wisdom to further a vision of the common good for Pacific peoples. This is the kind of leadership vision which Next Generation Leadership in the Pacific will have to advocate for and ground its leadership training in.

### **Components of Creating a New Vision**

To create a new vision, the following processes and tools may be considered to facilitate the creation of a new future for us in the Pacific region.

- *The Learner Approach:* Leadership must adopt a learner approach. The learner approach will enable leaders to engage all stakeholders in critical thinking and asking questions about the influences of the dominant interpretations of people's realities in the region.
- *The Critical Thinker Leader:* The Next Generation Leader in the Pacific who is a critical thinker will be able to distinguish interpretations from

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Interpreting the *future for the future* simply means *the ability to anticipate and plan*.

- facts. Once the distinction is made, the leader will then be able to choose which interpretations best suit our own Pacific context, thought processes, the people and the region.
- *Vision is the end result:* The vision becomes the end result and planning starts again from the end. To create new results, there must be new actions based on new conversations generated by new thinking. In this ongoing cycle of learning, Next Generation Leadership acts on the basis of the following convictions:
    - Listening is the foundation of leadership.
    - We can create and generate breakthroughs.
    - Conversation or dialogue among stakeholders is key, and these conversations create and generate new possibilities.

**Liberating visions and creating hopes for the region are processes and not products or destinations.** This is the gist of the vision and goals of MICNGOS (the Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations), with its dream of contributing to our common search for a liberating vision for our region. In the Marshall Islands at this time, schools are enjoying extra-long summer breaks and people have been stuck at home because of the COVID-19 lockdown. In a series of in-house training sessions for the MICNGOS staff, and in evening classes for Fijian students who have started attending USP, people are pursuing the possibilities for Next Generation Leadership in the Pacific. Part of this process is addressing the question, ‘how can our experience of the COVID-19 lockdown and our visions of a New Normal after the pandemic benefit our Pacific region?’

Participants in these exercises are distinguishing interpretations from facts, recognising the different worldviews and thinking processes they have internalised, and then creating and generating new interpretations of the common good in the Pacific. These visions of the common good will give them a new future that transforms hopelessness and resignation into a future in which we as Pacific Islanders can truthfully say, ‘the world in our hands!’

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## ***About the Author***

Mr. Laitia Tamata has been a Transformational Leadership trainer and coach in the Pacific region for some time, applying human rights, HIV/AIDS, gender & social inclusion, male advocacy to combat violence against women and girls (MAVAWG), good governance, democracy and constitutionalism as vehicles to transform thinking for the next generation. Laitia currently serves as the Executive Director of MICNGOS (Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations) based in Majuro, in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. As a constitutional and policy lawyer, he served as a Legal Policy Analyst in the Prime Minister's office in Fiji and in various civil society positions in the region (Cook Islands and Papua New Guinea) before taking up the post in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

# Weaving the New Normal: Envisioning a Post-COVID-19 Oceania

*Lopeti Senituli*



The COVID-19 pandemic could not have happened at a worse time in the history of the United Nations. For it is happening at a time when the American President, Donald Trump, is doing his best to dismantle<sup>54</sup> the global infrastructure that was created after World War II and was then painstakingly revitalised by all members of the United Nations at the end of the Cold War.<sup>55</sup> Trump's cutting of US funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) in April 2020 followed in the wake of his withdrawal of US participation in the UN Human Rights Council in June 2019, and UNESCO in December 2018. These funding cuts could not have come at a worse time, as unpaid assessed contributions to the UN as of 4 October 2019 totalled nearly \$1.4 billion, \$299 million higher than in 2018 (United Nations 2019).

I recall the new passion and energy that national delegations (both state and civil society) from both sides of the previous ideological divide brought to the series of UN international conferences that were convened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, beginning with the UN Conference on Environment and

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54 This is not to mention President Trump's disdain for the rules of engagement of the World Trade Organization as he tries to deliver on his election promise to 'make America great again' and his administration's declared intention to dismantle the international architecture that has kept the nuclear peace.

55 Asterisked by President Mikhail Gorbachev's dismantling of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and handing over the launch codes for its nuclear arsenal to the newly created Russian Federation President, Boris Yeltsin.

Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, followed by the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados in 1994, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, to name a few. Civil society organisations (as well as transnational corporations) were allowed for the first time to make an input into these negotiations, although one had to waylay the leaders of national delegations in the corridors or while they convened around the ubiquitous ashtrays<sup>56</sup> or the coffee carts during the breaks, with carefully crafted amendments to the negotiating texts that civil society caucuses had fought over in their own parallel negotiations.

Civil society was euphoric about the changes in global politics back then, and of course had a small hand in bringing it about. I recall being involved in a major gathering called the “People’s Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” in August 1989 in Minamata, Japan. It brought together representatives from most of the major progressive civil society organisations from South Asia, South East Asia, and the Pacific Islands regions, to discuss our visions and hopes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was hosted by Professor Muto Ichiyo of the Tokyo-based Pacific Asia Resource Centre. The outcome was the “Minamata Declaration” (PARC 1989). Please allow me to quote at length from it, because I believe the circumstances in which it was put together are similar, if not identical, to those in which we find ourselves today:

*The slogan at the beginning of the 20th century was progress. The cry at the end of the 20th century is survival. The call for the next century is hope. Impelled by that hope for the future and with a keen sense of urgency, we began our concluding gathering of the People’s Plan for the 21st century in Minamata.*

*It is significant that we met in Minamata, a place which symbolizes to all of us development at its most murderous. As it did to the people of Bhopal and Chernobyl, a giant organization with advanced science, technology and production techniques condemned the people of Minamata to fear, sickness and death, and their beautiful bay to irreparable damage. These three disasters – Minamata, Bhopal, and Chernobyl – can be taken as benchmarks of our time. At Minamata, the*

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56 Yes, smoking was permissible at UN premises and UN conferences back then!

*industry of a capitalist country poisoned its own citizens. At Bhopal, a U.S. multinational corporation poisoned people of the South. At Chernobyl, a socialist government spilled radiation out over its land and people and beyond its borders to the whole world. There is no need here to repeat the long and mounting list of eco-catastrophes. These three tell the story: there is no place to hide.<sup>57</sup> ...*

*The 20th century has brought us more murderous wars than at any other time in history. The technology of killing has advanced beyond the wildest imaginations of any previous era. The state, which was supposed to be our great protector, has turned out to be the greatest killer, killing not only foreigners in wars, but also killing its own citizens in unprecedented numbers. The 20th century has perpetuated and intensified the practices of genocide, ethnocide, ecocide and femicide. These practices have occurred in the name of what we have called 'progress' and 'development.'*

*All these force us to ask, is there not something profoundly wrong with our understanding of historical progress? Is there not something profoundly wrong with our picture of what to fight for? Is there not something profoundly wrong with our image of where to place our hopes? 'Janakashaba,' a word in the Minamata dialect, became familiar to all PP21 participants. Janakashaba means 'a world standing not like this.' It is a beautiful word... At this gathering, we talked about our aspirations for Janakashaba. Our hope is not an empty one. It is not a mirage. It is born in the midst of injustices, vices and corruption which make us cry and at times make us despair. We discussed the hope which inspires us to fight injustices as well as social, human and ecological decay. We asked ourselves whether there is a basis for such hope... This is precisely what is being acted out before our eyes today by millions of people in the Asia-Pacific region. They do not accept what has been foisted on them as their fate, they are ready to take the leap, and they are taking it. We witness wave after wave of people's movements, emerging, spreading, defying state boundaries, complementing one another, and sharing an increased sense of urgency fostered by new networks of communication...*

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57 Of course the jury is still out as to how COVID-19 originated, but I hope the point is appreciated.

*Hence, we declare that all people, especially the oppressed people, have a natural and universal right to criticize, oppose or prevent the implementation of decisions affecting their lives, no matter where those decisions are made. We declare that this right, as a people's right, is more fundamental than any artificial law or institution established by the state. We declare that this right means the right of the people to cross all borders, national and social, to carry their struggle to the exact sources of power seeking to dominate or destroy them. We need to make clear that this right must never be interpreted as justifying the actions of the powerful crossing borders to oppress, exploit and dispossess the people. On the contrary, we are asserting that the people have a right to counter these interventions which are going on all the time.*

*We have no illusions about the present condition of the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region. The ruling powers maintain themselves by dividing the people and encouraging hostility among them. The rulers not only seek to rule us, but also to manage our mutual relations, depriving us of our right to do this for ourselves. This we must reject and overcome. Trans-border political action, support and solidarity campaigns across borders will gradually develop a new 'people' that transcends existing divisions, especially between people living in the North and South.*

*'This is not Utopian: the actions we describe are actually going on all over the Asia-Pacific region, and all over the world. What we assert is that these trans-border actions are not merely the proper responses of the people to desperate situations. Taken together, they amount to the people collectively making their own 21st century.*

I believe there is a real and urgent need for 'a world not standing like this' right now! And only a global people's movement working in partnership with the United Nations can revitalise and empower the United Nations in general and the WHO in particular to fight this pandemic. As the WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in response to Trump's announcement of funding withdrawal, "COVID-19 does not discriminate between rich nations and poor, large nations and small. It does not discriminate between nationalities, ethnicities or ideologies. Neither do we. This is a time for all of us to be united in our common struggle against a common threat – a dangerous enemy" (*UN News* 15 April 2020). Global victory over the COVID-19 virus can never be achieved through individual and divided state action. And we must not allow

President Trump to divide and create hostility amongst the people and the nation states of the world.

I am grateful for the fact that the Tongan government, like several of our Pacific Island neighbours, locked down our international borders early in the ballgame, for it has so far kept us COVID-19 free and, more importantly, it

**“[In the New Normal], the governments of the region must initiate discussions with national financial institutions that will put in place a biblical-style Jubilee scheme to forgive the debts of the poorer sectors of society, so as to allow them to start anew. ”**

bought us valuable breathing space to prepare our national health system for its inevitable arrival on our shores. But so far the governments of the region have not been as forthcoming on the impact of the economic fallout from the pandemic, which will hit us like a slow-motion tsunami as the remittances from our seasonal workers and over-staying relatives overseas and our tourism dollars dry up.

So, although we may have goosed the agony of the first wave of infections through the early lockdowns of our borders, there is no guarantee that our fragile economies can sidestep the repercussions of long-term unemployment due to the economic downturn. We are already witnessing its ugly impact in our Pacific countries! I believe our

governments should take bold and decisive action to help the families of people who have lost or will lose their sources of livelihood due to the economic downturn. In addition to providing food parcels, the governments of the region must initiate discussions with national financial institutions that will put in place a biblical-style Jubilee scheme to forgive the debts of the poorer sectors of society, so as to allow them to start anew.

The 1918 influenza pandemic devastated quite a few of the Pacific island nations, including Tonga and Samoa. It is estimated that about 500 million people, or one-third of the world’s population, became infected and the number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide (CDC 2020). With no vaccine to protect against infection and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections, control efforts worldwide were limited to non-pharmaceutical interventions such as isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, and restrictions on public gatherings.

That is essentially where we are today in Tonga as we await our first infection and the development of a vaccine. The government declared a national emergency at the end of March and placed the country on lockdown, effectively shutting down “all public facilities, events and gatherings such as educational institutions, religious, kava clubs, bingo, sports clubs, gyms, sporting events and activities, celebrations of birthdays, marriages and other recreational or related gatherings” (Government of Tonga 26 March 2020). All funeral gatherings are restricted to a total of 10 people indoors and 20 people outdoors, “with an Authorised officer to be present.” This last restriction is of course impossible to maintain, even with authorised officers present. The restriction on religious gatherings in churches has so far been diligently observed, but the focus of worship has been enthusiastically relocated to the living rooms of individual families. The restriction on kava clubs is a different story, with many men drinking kava in groups on the sly. How long we can maintain public distancing is a poignant question to ask, but amidst all this there is no shortage of laughter!

As the race for the development and production of COVID-19 vaccines gathers momentum and intrigue, I am reminded of the proposal of the Maltese Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Avid Pardo, in 1967, during the negotiations on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, that the sea-bed and ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdictions, as well as its resources, should be declared the “common heritage of mankind.” This proposal eventually became entrenched<sup>58</sup> in the Convention on the Law of the Sea that came into force in 1994. The sea-bed and ocean floor is rich in cobalt, nickel, manganese, copper, gold, silver, zinc, manganese, and possibly also platinum, tellurium and rare earth elements. The question that springs to mind is, *can we not also declare the vaccines for COVID-19 to be the ‘common heritage of mankind,’ so that everyone everywhere can have access to it as a right, and not as a privilege?* If ever there was a time for such magnanimity from the Global North, it is now!

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<sup>58</sup> See Article 136 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

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***About the Author***

Lopeti Senituli is a political activist from the Kingdom of Tonga, having served as Director of the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (the secretariat of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific [NFIP] Movement) in Auckland and Suva, and founding Director of the Office of the Friendly Islands Human Rights and Democracy Movement in Nuku'alofa. He also served as Political Advisor to two former Prime Ministers of Tonga, and as CEO of the government's Ministry of Internal Affairs. He served as the representative from the Pacific churches to the World Council of Churches' Commission on International Affairs, as well as the Polynesian governments' sub-regional representative to the Pacific Islands Forum's Specialist Sub-Committee on Regionalism. He is a current member of the UNSW Diplomacy Training Program Advisory Council – International, and is an online USP student.

# A Fijian Vision for Pacific Regional Self-Determination and Cooperation

A Response to the Fiji Government's draft national ocean policy and the threat to climate change

*Jone Dakuvula*



*“Greta Thunberg is a great example of the young generation having enough and speaking up for our failing system. Look at her now, she’s not only had the attention of our leaders, but also got international attention. ...[she] spoke out not only for herself but for millions of people, including us in Fiji and the Pacific who are angry at our failing system and structures and scared for our uncertain future because of leaders who are prioritising thriving economies at the expense of community livelihoods and our environment. People cannot stand by and watch our planet be destroyed and the entire human race wiped out. This requires a radical shift if we are truly to save human kind, our planet and all living species.”*

Maria Nailevu – Fijian Feminist Climate Activist (Civicus 2019)

Although this is a more technical and social criticism of the Fiji Government Oceans Policy<sup>59</sup>, it is really an argument about the future facing our young people and how they need to be empowered. Pacific Oceans Commissioner Dame

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59 To better understand this critique of the Fiji Government's Ocean Policy, it is important that the reader knows something of the policy, which can be accessed from this website. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfalhoQACW15LtQWpVS5nx5CRz3AH9IC0LROWMi6w-SyFHaJ2w/viewform>.

May Taylor has noted that the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development begins in 2021. The theme of Ocean Day is “Innovation for a Sustainable Ocean.” There will be an international treaty to “start efforts to reverse the decline of ocean health and ecosystem. This provides opportunity for us to think differently and innovatively and act differently, creatively and constructively to ensure the world’s ocean is supported towards a recovery that will sustain us now and future generations” (Taylor 2019).

The first section of the draft Fiji Government National Oceans Policy (Fiji Ministry of Economy 12 May 2020) declares that it will become a “living document” to conserve and use our ocean and maritime resources for sustainable development. It states several high-minded *principles of coordination* across sectors (p.13): “high level leadership,” “priorities,” “integrated management,” participation in “planning of stewardship of all stakeholders,” as well as “equitable benefits” from all ocean resources for all Fijians. However, in our view this is a ‘dead document’ because there is no serious intention to implement it. We explain below why we say it is dead document and propose how it can become a living document.

The policy document is just words without any commitment of the Fiji Government to move beyond the status quo, or indeed to restore the practical vision of the development of the local fishing and maritime resources industry that we used to have under the leadership of the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, fifty years ago. That vision and precedent has been lost. At that time most of the fishing boats that supplied the fish loining and canning industry in Levuka were government owned fishing vessels. Then, in the next forty years, the industry became dominated and controlled by foreign fishing vessels and their local collaborators, who have engaged in exploitative marine polluting and illegal, careless and unsustainable fishing practices. Most of the income from the fishing services industry’s estimated value of \$FJ2.5 billion (\$US1.2 billion) goes to foreign fishing vessels and processing companies (p.6).

In other Pacific island countries like Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which have much bigger and richer marine resources within their EEZs, the disparity between local and foreign income resources is much bigger. Together these island nations get only about 2.5% of the income from their fish resources compared to foreign exploiters. The vision and objective of the National Policy document is unreal because Fiji does not own and control the fishing industry. The local ownership of Pacific marine resources is therefore of no consequence in the light of such realities.

This situation is shocking in the context of the COVID-19 induced and exposed collapse of the international economy, which has thrown into stark relief the vast inequalities of income between the 99% and the 1% who control the world economy and the advanced countries' economies, to whom the fish resources of the Pacific are exported. An OXFAM study found that 26 billionaires own and control more wealth than 3.8 billion people on the planet (OXFAM 2019). Although the great majority of the people in the USA, Europe, China, Japan, Korea and other countries benefit from eating fish from the Pacific Ocean, they are not the direct exploiters of the Pacific island countries who are supposed to own the fish. It is the owners of the fishing corporations fishing in the Pacific Ocean who are the exploiters and beneficiaries.

***“With an international depression developing, major local industries, businesses and small businesses are collapsing. Had Fiji developed a locally owned, controlled and more sustainable maritime industry and related services over the past 50 years, the situation of morally bankrupt inequality we have today would have been alleviated. ”***

Fiji, being one of the more developed island economies in the Pacific, had developed her fishing industry early, almost 60 years ago. By this time, then, we should be a model country for our neighbours in maintaining and expanding local commercial ownership and control of the industry, while promoting greater equality in the distribution of the benefits amongst all of Fijian society. Instead, the fishing industry has regressed to outside domination and control and deprivation of opportunities for the owners of the resource. With an international depression developing, major local industries, businesses and small businesses are collapsing. Had Fiji developed a locally owned, controlled and more sustainable maritime industry and related services over the past 50 years, the situation of morally bankrupt inequality we have today would have been alleviated. There is nothing in Fiji for our neighbours to emulate because we abandoned the vision of Ratu Mara long ago.

This statement of national policy, then, is not a commitment to empowering local development of the fishing industry. This is strange because the Ministry of the Economy, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Ministry of National Defence and National Security, the Fiji Navy, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other related organisations are all acknowledged in this draft policy paper to have contributed. They should be acutely aware of how far they are in reality and practice from the aims of the policy draft paper.

The paper is also not an assessment of where the Fiji maritime economy is at this point in time, which could have been done. If Fiji realistically wants to develop the maritime resources economy, the Ministries should have, for example, provided data on the number of fishing boats registered in Fiji, who owns them, who owns the fish processing factories, how much employment and profit they generate, how much income is collected at Fiji's ports, how much potential income is not collected by Government and local commercial fishing companies, how much is made by overseas owned companies, and what the Ministries are not able to do to increase Fiji's share of the fishing income. We need to know the reasons why, and what the civil servants, ports administrators and commercial operators say they can do to achieve certain targets for development. What will the proposed National Coordinating Committee do in the next five years in concrete terms to deal with this situation?

Our own information is that there are 15 locally registered fishing companies with 55 registered vessels. They are almost all foreign owned, but with token Fijian participation for obtaining Fiji fishing licences, export quotas and markets. There are no indigenous owned Fijian fishing vessels. Over 90% of export income from these companies does not flow into the Fiji economy. There is no reliable data on the fishing industry income and employment in Fiji. Most of the fishing boats in Fiji, both registered and those registered outside Fiji which use our ports to offload fish and get provisions, are owned by the Chinese or other foreign countries.

In terms of the regional dimensions of fishing, the Chinese fishing fleet is probably also the largest exploiter of tuna and other marine resources within the EEZs and international waters. China is said to consume more than a third of the fish caught globally. The Chinese fleet is the biggest fishing fleet in the world (12,000 fishing vessels and trawlers). 1,000 of these are registered overseas. 518 fly the flags of African countries. Many of these fish in the Pacific region, but

we have no information on how many. It is reported that China is responsible for two-thirds of the world's commercial stock being over-fished (*60 Minutes Australia* November 2019).

The same *60 Minutes Australia* TV programme (November 2019) revealed that the Chinese Government has likely engaged in bribing some political leaders in the Pacific region to change their recognition of Taiwan to China, which has started securing land and ports facilities rights. This seems to be a long-term master plan for China's increased presence in the South Pacific region in order to secure land and sea resources. This raises questions regarding which individuals in Fiji have been recipients of Chinese 'rewards' in the last 14 years in Government circles, as well as in the fish processing industries.

### **International Conventions**

In the list of acronyms of the draft policy paper (p.2), there is no reference to the International Maritime Organization Conventions (IMO) to which Fiji is a signatory. Why? The Conventions spell out what is to be done about:

- prevention of pollution from ships,
- training and qualification of seafarers,
- maritime search and rescue,
- unlawful acts against safety,
- safety of fishing vessels,
- sale of containers,
- standards of training for certification of crew for fishing vessels personnel,
- trade of passenger ships,
- Conventions covering intervention on the high seas in case of casualties from oil pollution.

The Conventions also cover:

- the response and cooperation needed to deal with control of harmful and fouling systems on ships,
- safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships,
- Civil Liability for Oil Pollution (CCC 1969),
- the Convention on Liability for Carriage of Noxious Substances (1996),
- Civil Liability on Damage caused by Carriage of Nuclear Materials,
- the Convention on the need for establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Pollution damages,
- the Convention on Carriage of Passengers and Luggage (1974), and
- the International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks (2007).

There is also no reference in the draft policy paper to the United Nations Convention for Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). These are important laws and regulations. What has the Minister of the Economy, who claims to have been the overall initiator of this National Policy Paper, done to advance Fiji's ratification of these international Conventions in the last 14 years? Indeed, what have the Ministers of the above-mentioned Ministries done? Have they read the draft National Policy Paper? How will the vision and goals be achieved in the next five years?

We also need to know what the Fiji civil servants and local commercial fishing organisations who have attended the international meetings that produced these international agreements done to advance them. What have Fiji civil servants done to persuade their Ministers to approve and implement these Conventions by taking the matters to the Cabinet and then to Parliament for legal approval? The status of parts of the IMO Convention approved by the Government (when it was internationally regarded as an illegal coup regime 2006–2013) need clarification by legal experts. This is necessary because it was opportunistic and avoided full ratification.

### **Civil Servants**

Pacific Dialogue, as an NGO concerned with democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the natural environment, was approached by individuals who had worked in the fishing industry for years to take up the issues of abuse of our people's human rights at sea and on land. They were concerned about the lack of knowledge of our people who were seafarers of their rights, the neglect by the relevant government authorities of their working conditions, and lack of provision of basic advisory services to workers who are injured, who spend months at sea working as slaves, and who are paid irregular and very low wages. When they are injured they are not compensated. Some die and the causes of their deaths at sea are not investigated. If investigated, the results are hidden.

We have, with the support of some important and qualified people in the industry, tried to meet with senior civil servants to discuss these concerns and to push for improvement and reform of our laws and policies process. Unfortunately, all that we have encountered has been avoidance of meetings and appointments, diversions by being somewhere else, purported illnesses, or references to others who were not involved.

The standard of service has deteriorated to such a level that it has become a hopeless situation. It seems civil servants live in fear of losing their jobs, and

some act politically. The inherited British culture of civility, professionalism and honest fearless advice to Ministers has gone. The Fiji civil service is now dominated by expatriates on high salaries and short-term contracts. There is no accountability because this is not a value at the political level. It is now impossible to get any official information from the government at the lower levels of the civil service bureaucracy under the Official Information Act. It is a prevention of information statute, not a freedom of information law for the public.

### **National Ocean Policy Vision and Mission**

*Vision: A healthy ocean that sustains the livelihoods and aspirations of current and future generations of Fiji.*

*Mission: To secure and sustain all of Fiji's Marine resources.*

The Vision and Mission of the draft national policy are excellent. The following nine guiding principles listed in the policy paper are:

1. stewardship and meaningful participation;
2. sound science and evidence-based decision making;
3. ecosystem and integrated management approaches – applying a strong human rights and gender response lens to all decision-making processes;
4. transparent, accountable and integrated response decision making;
5. adaptive and precautionary management;
6. fair and equitable participation and sharing of benefits for current and future generations;
7. gender equality and equity as fundamental to any development;
8. attention to trans-boundary harm;
9. accountability, transparency and public trust.

### **Comments**

The comments below relate to each of the above guiding principles.

#### *Principle 1*

There is no meaningful participation in decision making in the fishing industry by workers, women, people with disabilities, youths, or the Fijian people in general. Most people in Fiji are ignorant about how the fishing industry operates. The seafarers who are injured and disabled in the industry are discarded and forgotten. They are not compensated or, if they are, very poorly and after long delays. The indigenous Fijian people and women participate only at the lowest levels, as recruited seafarers and process workers with no training. Women as

factory workers are the heads of families with irregular low income from their husbands, who are at sea for months and only on land for short periods of rest. These families live in squatter settlements like Kalekana in Suva. In Levuka, where the PAFCO canning factory is based, with about 24 Fijian villages and settlements of over 8,000 dependents, the women working at the factory are the sole income earners. The rural economy in Ovalau Island survives largely on the fishing industry. The collapse of the international trading economy into depression conditions at present will severely impact the rural economy of Ovalau Island and the fishing community of Kalekana in Suva. Fiji Fish, a local fishing company, has laid off 260 employees because of the closure of overseas markets (Singh 10 June 2020).

### *Principle 2*

It is unclear how science and evidence affect decision making in the fishing industry. There is no clear link between the research at the Maritime School at the University of the South Pacific and the fishing industry. In which sectors of industry are the marine science graduates from USP employed? At the Fiji National University, the graduates from the Maritime Academy are not employed directly in the foreign-controlled fishing industry because their qualifications are not required by the industry. These well qualified citizens move to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA to be employed and earn an income commensurate with their qualifications. Fiji needs to create the conditions in the fishing industry that will enable their employment here.

All the evidence of climate science, and especially recent findings, conclude that humanity has only about five years to avoid the tipping point towards the uncontrollability of climate – yet this dire information does not inform this policy document with the needed sense of urgency. What needs to be done by the fishing industry in Fiji through the Government is not evident in this document. It is the responsibility of the Government to lead in imposing control of the fishing industry to prevent depletion of the fishing stock of Fiji and the South Pacific region through over-exploitation. This has to start with support for the IMO Conventions through ratification and implementation in our legal system. Following that are the necessary restrictions to foreign fishing in our EEZ and implementation of the restrictions on local as well as foreign fishing vessels that are not registered here but use Fiji ports for their needs. All must obey our laws, and we need the manpower and qualifications to enforce these. The laws must be updated and simplified.

*Principle 3*

Recognition of the link between economy, ecology, culture and human rights is important. The present situation is that there is no recognition of the human rights of our people involved in the fishing industry. This starts from the inadequacies of the existing maritime and labour laws, the lack of commitment of government to ratify IMO Conventions, and the lethargy of local employees of the Ministries and Ports Authorities that service the maritime industry. Localisation needs to start with the Ports Authority in Fiji, which is partly owned and managed by a Sri Lankan company. This company also controls the Maritime Academy at Fiji National University and there is no justification for this. Sri Lankans do not own the fishing industry. The Maritime Academy should be run by citizens of Fiji.

*Principle 4*

There is no efficient and integrated decision-making process at the interface between the fishing industry and the Government and public authorities in Fiji, because the industry is in the hands of foreign companies and their vessels. The fish processing businesses are just fronts for evasion of the \$450 per ton levies. The fish are offloaded into processing sheds that just reload the fish into containers (for lower fees), and these go back to the ships which then ship them to the export markets! The few that are for the local tinning factories are transported by trucks. We have no information on how much Fiji earns from local fish exports. Most 'exports' are by foreign fishing vessels, and the profits are made in Thailand and other destination countries. The local companies are only concerned with their commercial profit, and there is no sense of shared public or national interest. Representations by some local industry representatives to the Government departments concerned are therefore neglected and easily diverted by the civil servants who are not encouraged by their political masters to perform their duties.

There is no vision or commitment at the political level because, ever since the coup of 2006 and the international sanctions from 2007 to 2013, the Government's main interest has been in how much income can be obtained from the industry

***“All the evidence of climate science, and especially recent findings, conclude that humanity has only about five years to avoid the tipping point towards the uncontrollability of climate – yet this dire information does not inform this policy document with the needed sense of urgency. ”***

through port levies and charges. This remains the attitude today, and the draft National Policy cannot hide this. Fiji's National Oceans Policy requires public support but it has been drafted in a vacuum. There has also been no Government interest in developing the fishing industry to maximise income to the country for the long term. All government measures in the fishing industry are for short-term income raising convenience. There has been no interest in the state of the ocean's environment until this policy paper turned up. It appears to have been drafted by a UN Agency to get the Government to be on board the UN Decade for Oceans sustainability bandwagon.

#### *Principle 5*

There is a good recognition under the principle (p.12) that if a decision could potentially prevent severe or irreversible harm to society or the environment, then the absence of scientific certainty or consensus should not prevent that decision being taken. This is the situation the world is in with the latest findings of climate scientists about the near tipping point. The conclusion reached at the Paris International Climate Conference in 2017, that the world had a 50-year time frame in which to make the necessary decisions and institutional reforms to save us from a climate disaster, is no longer relevant. We have no time to lose. Fiji must lead the region by ratifying all IMO Conventions now, and push at regional meetings for the same actions by our neighbours. It has to be a joint regional action strategy, a determined and consistent response for the preservation of the Ocean ecology, the fishing industry, and the fishing marine stock in our EEZs. National and local control of the industry should begin in Fiji to encourage our neighbours to do the same.

#### *Principle 6*

“Fair and equitable sharing of benefits for the current and future generations” is not happening in the industry because the people in Fiji, through their Government, do not control commercial fishing. Traditional local fishing within the 12-mile boundary is being regulated and policed but not beyond that point. Our people's ancestors were skilled seafarers and conservationists in their fishing culture and traditions. This is being lost because we have not invested in *vanua*-based fishing enterprises. In Fiji, we need to create new banking and public investment facilities to empower our people to develop and grow our own sustainable fishing industries and displace foreign fishing entities. The Fiji Navy is useless as a policing force when Fiji does not have the legal infrastructure or the commitment to conservation fishing practices needed in our EEZ. We repeat the point that this stems from the fact that Fiji does not own and control the commercial fishing in our waters. We understand that some

local fishing interests represented in Fiji Fish Ltd want to take over the PAFCO Canning Factory in Levuka. We oppose this because these local fishing interests have exploited indigenous Fijian labour and have never shown any interest in partnership with *vanua*- based Fijian companies. Now that Fiji Fish has lost its overseas markets and laid off 280 staff, they want to buy PAFCO from the government (Singh 10 June 2020). PAFCO should be sold to the workers in the factory and the Lomaiviti Provincial Council. Government should provide the equity capital for the purchase.

#### *Principle 7*

Recognising the role of women in small-scale fisheries and other local related activities and their equal rights is important. As stated earlier, women are the most exploited and oppressed workers given the way the industry is organised. Many are working in processing factories and look after their families in the absence of their husbands, who are at sea. The Fiji Government needs to implement a ‘universal income’ through the Fiji Reserve Bank so that poor woman looking after children at home can have their poverty alleviated. A Compensation Fund needs to be set up and funded from income from the fishing industry, because this will directly help women and children at the lower end of the industry.

#### *Principle 8*

The “Trans-boundary Harm Principles” recognise that national sovereignty should not be a barrier to cooperative actions on violations and damage to the environment and social and economic deprivation of the rights of Pacific people involved in the fishing industry. This requires, first, the establishment of similar and consistent legal frameworks and policies in the Pacific island countries as the basis for cooperation. This can only be achieved if ownership and control of the fishing industry is the objective of National Policy in all Pacific island countries, to be achieved soon with the support of Australia and New Zealand.

The other limb of the trans-boundary principle is the lack of legal and effective guidelines for dealing with our seafarers who, for various reasons, are abandoned in ports overseas where Fiji does not have diplomatic representation. Our seafarers need to be trained in the procedures to follow so they can be safely returned to Fiji. This requires uniform laws and policies in all our Pacific island countries for providing assistance to our seafarers who are mistreated, so that the shipping companies responsible are proscribed in all the ports and compelled to pay compensation to their victims. At present, foreign fishing companies change their registrations and play Pacific island countries off against each other, and this enables them to continue exploiting our fishing zones. Some

fishing vessels offload dead bodies of Asian crews in Fiji, and at autopsies they are found to have been murdered and not the victims of accidents at sea. Proper investigations are not undertaken because the boats concerned are not within Fiji's jurisdiction. This situation should be rectified in all Pacific countries.

*Principle 9*

The principles of “accountability, transparency and public trust” are not realised in Fiji because the people are largely ignorant of the operation of the fishing industry, including those who work in the industry. There is no public trust in the industry when there is no basis for people to believe they have a stake in its future. The Government does not believe in accountability and transparency in this industry, and hence reliable information about fishing industry decision making and the state of fishing resources that are being exploited is hard to obtain. Accountability and trust will only be realised when the National Policy is to nationalise the fishing industry and make transparency and accountability the basis for cooperation with our neighbours in the Pacific region.

*Principle 10*

A new principle (#10) that is missing should cover the important issue of the use of foreign fishing vessels for drug trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling of illicit goods into the country. There is also the important issue of foreign fishing vessels as sources of the introduction of pandemic diseases into Fiji and the Pacific islands, such as COVID-19. Boats have been the source of pandemic disease in the Pacific islands ever since the earliest contact with Europeans. Fiji should initiate the recognition of this principle by ratifying the IMO Nairobi Protocol that provides guidelines for dealing with pandemic diseases carried by fishing vessels and other ocean vessels that dock in Fiji ports. The Government should pass comprehensive laws that empower the officials manning our ports to deal with these ships and impose appropriate penalties.

*Principle 11*

Principle 11 needs to be added to the National Oceans Policy, and it is about a commitment to improve the working conditions and protect the human rights of Pacific seafarers, including foreign seafarers who are employed by fishing corporations within the Pacific island states' jurisdiction. Whereas in the past there were more Pacific people working on fishing boats, this has been reduced to only about 2 or 3 per vessel. It is cheaper for the fishing companies to employ Indonesians, Filipinos and other Asian crews. It also costs less to get them returned to their home countries through Fiji when they do not need them. Accounts we receive from Fiji crew speak of lack of sleep, unhealed

injuries, low wages, cramped living spaces, fights between crews of different nationalities, racial discrimination by the ship captains, bullying by senior crew against junior crew, and illiteracy of Asian crews. Because of long absences at sea (often up to 2 years) and lack of payment of their wages from the shipping agents to their wives, some Fijian crew return to shore and find their wives have left them for other men who could support their children.

To improve working conditions at sea, Fiji and other Pacific Island governments need to require that all fishing vessels have 50% Pacific Islander crews, and minimum living wages that are enforced at all Pacific ports. Living conditions at sea must improve and be policed. The qualifications of our seafarers should be standardised and governments should make them aware of their rights, such as trade union rights. There should be a regional trade union for Pacific seafarers that other foreign crew will be required to join. Governments of the Pacific island countries should also support civil society organisations which are committed to the welfare and human rights of Pacific seafarers.

## Conclusion

Fiji should take the lead in making regional cooperation in the Pacific meaningful and effective. This can start with ratifying all relevant IMO Conventions and laws providing the legal and policy frameworks for taking effective control of our fishing industry, on the basis of ownership by the indigenous people who have the land and fishing rights within our 12-mile boundaries. Local control needs to take place in coordination with all Pacific island countries who are full members of the Pacific Islands Forum, especially the Melanesian Spearhead Group. As the Pacific Oceans Commissioner Dame Meg Taylor noted at the beginning

***“In the Pacific region we now need to question whether the international industrial system can continue in terms of its own logic. What is the desirable future for Pacific Islanders who do not control the fishing of our own Ocean?”***

of this paper, this is the UN Decade of Action for a Sustainable Pacific Ocean. Effective actions are called for from all members of the Pacific Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group.

The need to implement the vision and address the concerns highlighted here is about the future of our young people. We need to empower them to take control of their future. It is what the young are asking for all around the world. Pacific island governments have a critical responsibility to our youth and children

at this time to take the lead for preservation of our fish and land resources. These actions should be supported by the Australian and New Zealand governments.

Finally, the fishing industry in the Pacific is part of the Western and Asian industrial system of exploitation of nature and her resources based on the competition dynamic of neoliberal globalisation. China is the new industrialising giant, together with Korea, Taiwan, Japan and other emerging Asian countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Sri Lanka, with large populations and an expanding middle class.

The assumption of Pacific governments has been that the fish resources of the Pacific only need to be managed wisely, through capital, bureaucracy and science-based solutions. But this assumption does not call into question the industrial and ideological systems that have allowed for the exploitation of both the resources of our Ocean and our seafarers. This is what the climate change emergency now calls into question. In the Pacific region we now need to question whether the international industrial system can continue in terms of its own logic. What is the desirable future for Pacific Islanders who do not control the fishing of our own Ocean? We assert the need for effective control over our coastal and Ocean economic zone resources. It is a challenge to our leaders of the Pacific region at this time.

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***About the Author***

Jone Dakuvula was one of the first graduates of the University of the South Pacific in Politics and Public Administration. He is currently the Executive Director of Pacific Dialogue Ltd, a Fiji-based NGO concerned with human rights, the rule of law, democracy, conflict prevention, good governance, human rights at sea and sustainable environment.

# **In Solidarity We Stand – Towards a New Oceanic-European Partnership**

*Vincent Gewert*



More than most phenomena in our already interconnected world, the COVID-19 pandemic is a truly global crisis. There is not a single country which has not enforced strict laws to protect its citizens. Even though capacities for adaptation are distributed highly unequally among individual countries, all states currently find themselves in an emergency situation.

If we are unlucky, this will lead to even more competitiveness, more isolation, and more rivalries and exploitation between and within countries as they try to rebuild their economies after the crisis. But if we are lucky, this crisis is a chance to recognise our shared humanity and start new partnerships on equal terms. This, as a young German who was allowed to live at the Pacific Theological College in Fiji for one year, is my vision for Oceania's future – that we can finally build equal partnerships in which both sides are respected.

Of course, one prerequisite for such a partnership is that the former colonial powers listen to their former colonies and take responsibility for both the past and the present. The colonial endeavour as a crime in itself needs to be condemned, and the ongoing racism recognised. Continuing forms of oppression such as exploitation of resources need to be fought against collectively. However, I am deeply convinced that the current COVID-19 crisis can indeed trigger such a process among former colonial oppressors.

During COVID-19, the instabilities of our current political and economic system have reached not only the exploited countries, but also the exploiters.

The effects of subordinating all values to economic growth rates have formerly manifested themselves mainly in the Global South. Now they are showing themselves in the form of a virus on the entire globe. There is a wide recognition that, for example, the loss of biodiversity is closely connected with the spread of new viruses such as COVID-19. European citizens can no longer close their eyes to the fact that exploiting nature's resources at the cost of the Global South's wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of the natural environment, is not only immoral but is, in the long run, condemned to failure. By recognising this, European countries can also realise their collective responsibility for past and present forms of oppression – and make way for an entirely new form of partnership.

After COVID-19, I imagine a partnership that addresses the needs of the people. I imagine a partnership in which it is natural that wealthy countries do not contribute more to problems like climate change, but instead do everything to slow it down. I imagine a partnership whose development goals are not merely to increase the rates of economic growth. This is an old system way of thinking that has benefitted international corporations more than grassroots people.

In my vision of development, it is not the so called 'foreign experts' who will decide what is best for a particular country or culture. It is the affected people themselves who will decide which way of life they want to live, goals they want to pursue, and the aspects of development they will prioritise. I myself am not capable of outlining what exactly this new vision of development will look like. Rather, this vision lies with the people themselves. They know best which needs should be addressed by a new economic and political system. My personal vision for Oceania, then, is that the people of Oceania demand and advocate for a partnership with Europe that serves an Oceanic rather than a European concept of wellbeing and development.

### ***About the Author***

Mr. Vincent Gewert is a 20-year-old German university student. He spent a year as a volunteer at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, between 2018 and 2019. He is passionate about climate justice, intercultural exchange, philosophy, cycling and jazz music.

## CONCLUSION

If there is one common sentiment among all the contributors to this publication, it is this: Despite the external and internal forces impacting on the region and its people, this collection highlights the agency of the human person and the human community to create and recreate a set of realities that is understandable to themselves in the context of their worldviews. Many of the contributors profess to belong to one or another of the great faith traditions, and to one or another of the region's cultural and indigenous traditions. These and their experiences of life in the times in which we live are the foundations upon which their agency is built. In this respect, and while there is much frustration expressed by many regarding the current or Old Normal, there is also much hope and vision to pursue a New Normal.

Some of the visions expressed in this publication propose practical ways in which their visions can be made real – from a new regional economic and trading system to a regional political arrangement, a manifesto for cultural exchange, and new models of educational philosophy, structure and curriculum. What these and other vision articles have revealed is the reclamation of our power to determine our reality and story. There are of course challenges with regards to regional coordination, solidarity and, in general, regional cooperation. But these are not insurmountable. In fact, like the region's self-determination movements from the 1970s to the 1990s, the generation of mutually recognised trends in the region under the Old Normal prior to the coronavirus pandemic may very well ignite a regional movement to 'change the story of development.'

In the expressions of their visions, most of the contributors did not propose specific recommendations; their diverse visions can be considered as recommendations. While the call for visions did not specifically ask for practical or strategy recommendations, these, however, can be gleaned from the various visions which the contributors have expressed. In that regard, and if there is one recommendation that could be presented by the editors, it is the following:

*That the contributors discuss and build their specific national movements around the ideals that they have presented in this publication, and stimulate a regional movement to bring to life and practice the changes in the development story they wish to see in their countries and our region.*





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“This publication reaffirms Pacific peoples’ determination to recreate and redefine different motifs for weaving their life stories, their dreams, as well as their arts and heritages and how they relate to one another and to nature. I congratulate the book’s authors and editors for this timely gift of love and call for action towards a better world.”

*Professor Konai Holeva Thaman*

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“Pacific communities in our ‘sea of islands’ have for millennia been founded on reciprocity, mutual respect, solidarity and caring for the most vulnerable – giving rather than taking, and taking only what was needed.”

*Professor Vijay Naidu*

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“We have much to learn from the rest of the world, but also much to share. One of these lessons is our respect for our ancestors. We need to re-examine our belief systems regarding how we link with our land and sea and the resources we gain therefrom.”

*Mrs Suliana Siwatibau*

